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FAR EAST

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CECIL BEATON'S SCRAPBOOK

CECIL BEATON'S NEW YORK

MY ROYAL PAST

TIME EXPOSURE (*With Peter Quennell*)

HISTORY UNDER FIRE (*With James Pope-Hennessy*)

NEAR EAST

INDIAN ALBUM

CHINESE ALBUM

Published by Batsford

FAR EAST

By

CECIL BEATON

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PREFACE

MANY people during the last few years have made fantastic journeys to the far corners of the Earth at record speed. My feats were not extraordinary. But it is possible, I think, that some readers may like to escape with me for a few hours from their everyday surroundings and share the superficial impressions of a traveller who visited for the first time, and in wartime conditions, some quarters of the Orient. I can promise that they will read nothing of politics. Gandhi is not mentioned here. Nor will they find any attempt to solve the Indian problem. Too much criticism has been aired by others—little of it constructive.

This is not an official book. The views expressed are my own. I was sent to India and China by the Ministry of Information as a photographer. It was agreed before I left that any writing I chose to do was entirely my own affair.

I wish to thank all those who received me so patiently and, often in trying circumstances, showed me so much friendliness.

C. B.

April, 1945.

CHAPTER I

DEPARTURE

DEPARTURE before daylight. Paddington Station was dark, misty and bitterly cold. A group of army officers, some with red tabs, and a few rather seedy looking civilians, assembled in the reserved compartment which would take us to our transport plane. Later, in an enormous Nissen hut, on a moor in the most inclement corner of England, we awaited news from the Meteorological experts, who for days had been watching the movement of a depression. There were patches of snow on the ground. As they huddled around a sulky stove, sailors, who knew the North Sea, said they had never experienced such weather. The pilots were joking among themselves: "I haven't been so cold since I spent New Year's Eve in jug." A line of nearly twenty transport aircraft, the overcrowded Mess, the presence of Field Marshal Smuts, trying to warm his calves at a fire in an anteroom—all indicated that this was a serious hold-up.

For eleven hours we waited. Our pilot, a young blond Canadian, lean and lithe, with a stance like a gorilla, had high cheek-bones and pale almond eyes that closed upwards when his mouth twisted into a smile. He edged towards the stove to rub his hands. At two o'clock in the morning, in another icy hut, we had breakfast—an egg and bacon and coffee. "Smuts has taken off," they told us. Now there was a chance of our leaving in a couple of hours. But my spirits were low. My whole body ached with the cold; and I was full of apprehensions.

Zero hour—"Yes, we're off."

We were led out into the sharp blackness of the night and dimly lighted to a lorry. First stop, a farm building on the moor where we were trussed up in boiler-clothes that seemed to add bulk without giving warmth. The interior of the aircraft, when we reached it, proved to have been stripped of all but the minimum equipment. One side of the fuselage was packed with luggage and miscellaneous cargo, huge rubber tyres for airplanes, crates and "secret" packages. The door was locked. We sat in thick blackness and listened to the roar of the engines. Then the aircraft trundled forward, bumping along the uneven frosty ground.

The agony of terror that followed, though it lasted only a few minutes, seemed an eternity. Already, at the start of the run, I bowed my head in my hands and prayed very hard because I was so frightened. Then my terror was intensified. My eyes were shut tight, and I tried not to take cognisance of anything outside my own head; but somehow I felt that these were my last seconds of life, and I decided that I must spend them contemplating pleasant subjects. All sorts of unexpected and forgotten pictures raced through my mind. I saw my family when I was a child. I saw a schoolboy named Geoghegan, waiting for me to finish my school tea, as was his custom, under an arcade of chestnut trees, outside the playground of my old preparatory school: he waited to give me a lift home on

the step of his bicycle, and our friendship was tranquil and harmonious. I relived my sensations of excitement produced at Christmas by the gift of a picture postcard of a musical comedy favourite. I had idyllic memories of the first time I fell in love—of a soft welcoming gesture of affection from my small house in the country during the height of summer. I remembered the gaiety of certain New York winters, and again smelt the hotel-rooms I occupied. I had visions of the silver grey trees, against blue skies, that Piero della Francesca painted in his frescoes at Arezzo. . . . This was all too pleasant: beauty doesn't consist only of pleasure; and I tried to make myself visualise uglier things; but I could think of nothing that was not ecstatic. My ideas worked up to a crescendo of clear vivid thought. I was in a delirium of pleasure and terror. Outside my own thoughts I knew that my deepest fears had turned to reality, that my anxieties had become actualities. In the air our machine was banging violently from side to side. "Yes, that's it. Now we're for it!" I heard someone say.

I opened my eyes: through the cracks of the closed door leading into the cockpit I saw flashes. Suddenly we were rattled like dice, and I found myself lying on a mound of parachute harnesses, halfway down the fuselage. Now the flames were everywhere. A huge tongue of blue flame darted the length of the cabin. The cockpit was an orange glow. Outside the night was lit by enormous different coloured fires. In the aircraft were odd patches of flame, and a bright phosphorescent fire centred in the extreme rear. The engines continued to roar; and I supposed that we were still airborne. So this was the end; this was death; any second now I should know the unknown. Meanwhile I analysed quite calmly the various stages through which I passed. No use fighting death—there was nothing to be done about it. The flames approached. Everyone was very quiet in the aircraft, and even now behaved with the polite reserve of Englishmen. I looked up to see the whole fuselage illuminated by a dense suffocating orange smoke, through which the silhouetted figures of the air-crew, in their cumbersome divers-suits, ran past, groping in the fog of burning aluminium. Still no one spoke. I lay holding my head, thinking that, as soon as the flames reached us, there would be panic and fighting and I should be tramped underfoot. And why not? I had accepted the worst; this was it. Somebody shouted: "Open that bloody door!"

I could see various passengers hopefully and pathetically groping for an exit. One of the civilians had the presence of mind to turn his torch on to the latch of the door. Its beam seemed very white in the glow of the fires. Then I understood, by some queer reflex, that the door was open. "So they are jumping for it," I thought, "rather than be burned. How high are we? Well death is one stage further this way. . . . So here goes!" I crawled along the floor backwards and tipped myself out, head first, into the cold black night. A short drop; and I was astonished to find myself, with a minor bump on the head, upside-down in a grassy field covered with hoar frost and patched with snow. The air struck me as bitterly cold. Around and above me were flames.

"Get up and run," someone shouted. "The airplane may explode."

In spite of a tremendous weakness in the knees, and the weight of my

cumbrous clothing; I ran, as we all ran, falling, getting up again and running, turning at last to watch the destruction of the plane from the vantage point of safety. The broken monster lay spurting flames. Deep ochre and black smoke coiled upwards in a great tower: the cockpit was diamond bright; the burning edges of the wings suggested flare-paths on an aerodrome, or gala illuminations of a pre-war pier. Our lungs filled with fumes, we coughed as we watched. It surprised us to find how little shocked we were. Someone said the shock would come later. It did. Meanwhile we gazed at the burning plane, as it vomited out different coloured flames and spat forth distress signals of pink, mauve and golden rockets. We discussed our miraculous escape. We had crash-landed—another fifty yards and we would have plunged into the ocean. What was the cause of our crash? An engine iced up? But no one knew.

I could not feel proud of the negative way in which I had behaved: just to lie and accept death was of little help to others. . . . It was a passenger pilot who had known how to pull up an emergency lever and jettison the locked door.

"Are we all here? Are you all right?"

The airfield was dotted with flame-lit figures. "The pilot didn't get away," remarked the navigator. Fumes brought tears to our eyes as we looked at the funeral pyre of the charming young Canadian. The night wind was icy and cut the scalp like a knife. Eventually the ambulance came up. And then, thank God, staggering out of the darkness, his neck and forehead bleeding, his face green, appeared our pilot. He had been thrown clear of the aircraft a hundred yards away. He was taken off in the ambulance suffering, we discovered later, from internal injuries. He had a broken arm and ribs; a kidney had to be removed—the stick had gone through his stomach; his flying days were over.

Accepting the fact that we were safe, each of us now remembered his particular treasures as they burned before our eyes.

"There goes all I possess. I've nothing but what I stand up in," the passenger-pilot said. "Most of all I mind losing the photographs of my child. They were taken at different stages ever since he was born."

"All my papers have gone," said another man. "The result of weeks of meetings."

"I've got my bag all right," the deaf Wing Commander, who was travelling as R.A.F. Courier, added. While the others had been fighting to get the door open, he had been throwing the baggage about to find his precious burden. In the lorry, on our way to hospital, someone congratulated him. "What I want to know," he replied, "is, will they give us another breakfast. I'd go through that again any time, so long as they give us another egg."

CHAPTER II

DELHI

THE bearer, white turbaned and bare-footed, pulled back the curtains to let in a blaze of sun. Outside, the fountains were playing, the birds shrieking: someone was practising on a bugle, and sentries cleared their throats with a resounding rasp, spat and stamped their bulbous boots on the gravel. Another bearer, in scarlet tunic, came in to salaam and give me a present. Yet another servant, in an enormous cheese-cloth puggari, brought in a necktie wrapped in coloured paper. It was Christmas Day in New Delhi. . . .

My second attempt to fly to the East had been uneventful. On my return to re-equip myself, after the crash, London had seemed grimmer and more forlorn than I had remembered. The weather was consistently grit-grey; there was an epidemic of influenza; everyone seemed un-nerved; my resistance was low and I chafed against the tyranny of small restrictions. My second set of travelling companions behaved like all travelling companions. Wherever we landed we ate gluttonously. In the air we complained of the unaccustomed surfeit of food, and proceeded forthwith to help ourselves to a meal out of a carton and some soupy tea from a celluloid cup. By the end of each day, the places we had left behind were remote and dreamlike in our memory. Before each dawn came the hangman's Reveillé, followed by exhausting hours of doing nothing. Occasionally the voracious silver porpoise would alight to refuel. Rather crumpled, the passengers emerged from its entrails for a breather in an oil-smelling launch. At last, in the unbecoming heat of the midday sun, we saw the great brick blisters, pig-pink and opaque as plasticine, of New Delhi.

My first days were spent wandering down the long corridors of the Secretariat. Arrangements were made for me to go to the Burma Front, to the North-West Frontier, to Madras, to Kochin. But each day brought some alteration of plans, some delay or disappointment; and I soon understood that I would have to stay longer in Delhi than I had intended. "This is Headquarters from which all arrangements are made," I was told. "But, old boy, you can't expect anything to be done overnight. It all takes time. You should have warned us before. You see, *your* trouble is, old man, that you come under so many different headings! You see, there's S.E.A.C.: there's H.Q. India Command (that's us): there's the Government of India, the Far Eastern Bureau, the Ministry of Broadcasting and Information—there's. . . . But I'll take you to Brigadier Oldfield of S.E.A.C.—he'll help you."

It was difficult to hear quite what was happening in this crowded small office. On the telephone Major Arnold was giving someone hell for spelling Air Marshal with two I's; while from outside came a fearsome noise as of souls in torment—a dozen natives, unsuitably draped, were trying to lift a safe. Unperturbed, Brigadier Oldfield planned an itinerary for me on a map. "Then you go to Cox's Bazaar—or Bawli Bazaar—



Indian Flautist



Early Morning Lecture to the Leaders of South East Asia Command

get a plane at Ramu for Chittagong—on to Camilla. Let me explain," he pointed, "this is the front here—we're moving towards Maungdaw."

I was allowed into the War Room of South East Asia Command. The chiefs of all Departments, American and English, "breezed in" for early morning prayers, to study the latest maps, and to hear the day's reports and short lectures given by half a dozen specialists. The Supreme Commander, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had arrived in this theatre not long before, seemed as yet unaffected by the climate. "We mustn't let it be a damper on effort—we've got to galvanise everyone, got to teach 'em to hustle," he said—and he appeared to have impregnated his immediate entourage with his own robust enthusiasm. In spite of all the difficulties he had encountered, no glaze of disappointment was visible in his eyes. They twinkled with the delight of a boy who has just been given a Meccano for Christmas—which incidentally, I believe, was just about all he had been given. For was it not decided, at the Teheran Conference, that the Eastern theatre could not be a scene of great activity until the European war was over?

In the War Room, sitting among admirals, air-marshals and generals, the Supreme Commander would interrupt the lecturer to ask pertinent questions. Mountbatten was ebullient: his toy seemed to be working well. But some of his minions had gone to sleep again. It was early morning still; and the droning voice of the lecturer, in the otherwise silent room, acted as a soporific.

While awaiting further instructions I spent many days sight-seeing as far away from Headquarters as possible. I was excited by the glimpse of my first wild parrot, monkey, elephant, and stimulated by the brilliant, poisonous colours and ceaseless movement of Old Delhi. In the Chadni Chowk (the Street of Moonlight), at one time considered the richest street in the world, now an alleyway full of bargains and trash, a begging Sardhou, naked and daubed with dung, an "exponent of destitution", extended a withered arm. Other holy men had whitened faces; and there were boys with heavily kohl-painted eyes, their teeth, tongue and lips scarlet with betel nut. In the thoroughfares, pedestrians, bicycles, carts and sacred animals were wedged together in an almost inextricable confusion. Women resembled human beehives, entirely covered with white cloth except for the small letter-box slot through which their painted eyes peered. The shops, no more than window-recesses, contained spangled tassels, glittering phials of perfume, filligree jewels and vivid foodstuffs. A stall of vile-coloured drinks, in bottles stopped with fans of magenta paper, had been built around a sprawling Peepul tree; its bark, painted emerald green, gave the scene an added gaudiness. Everywhere one found unexpected sequences of colour—no gorgeous oriental riot but an extraordinary jumble of apparently inharmonious colours, harmonised nevertheless by some unknown law. Wonderfully lovely, for example, were the Rajputana women's skirts of dirty tomato red, with dull powdery rose or lobster pink draperies. White played a large part in the general scheme; and the touches of scarlet, such as the broad border on a child's

white coatee (worn over white trousers) or the alazarin cape thrown over a shoulder, were tremendously effective.

In the neighbourhood of Delhi, I visited early Hindu forts of the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries, and Early Mohammedan forts and cities. Sometimes the day would end as we wandered among the Pillars of Victory, the shrines, the relics of the old cities of Delhi, or lingered at the fort of Tughlakabad or the Tomb of Humayan. From the parapet of one of these great monuments, in the precious moments of twilight, one saw India at her best. In the foreground, the domes of mosques, originally bright with coloured marbles, but much more beautiful now in their present quiet tonality: in the distance, the lilac-coloured jungle. A crescent moon would appear, in silvery contrast to the few wisps of golden cloud that were hurrying to be away before the sky became completely dark: cranes and other large birds were flying home and their wings made a breathless flapping noise: white parrots, very small, but tightly clustered, gave the impression, as they passed, of a flying carpet. Jackals came out and slunk off again, horrible hangtail scavengers. A shepherd, rather sadly, was playing on his flute; and from the distance we heard the echoing call to Evening Prayer.

One afternoon, all the way from Old Delhi to the Safdar Jung Tomb beyond the new Capital, the highways were filled with a great concourse of Mohammedans, taking part in the yearly festival of the Mohorrun. The crowds on foot, or brimming over the sides of bullock carts, were in their best clothes. In the West, people seem to choose colours for no particular reason. Here each colour appeared to indicate an uncompromising personal preference. One woman was a walking rainbow, in a small crinoline of apricot yellow that faded to pink and mauve. A ragamuffin had staked all on a surprising dark-red coat of the finest quality velvet. A delicate looking little boy wore, very correct and straight across his brow, a gold embroidered cap of deep grape colour; the cut of his tight-fitting coat and the precision of his taste were such that one felt this perfect work of art should have been preserved in a showcase. Down the streets, enormous edifices of coloured paper and tinsel were borne on poles. And each flimsy temple represented a very definite taste: one, of orange and silver, seemed to be conscious of its loveliness; another, of white and pale pastille green, was timid and tentative. Each had its own variety of rhythmic movement, as it swayed or jogged along under the dark trees. On a piece of high ground, parched and pale yellow, with gnarled trees and rocks, the procession halted. The paper edifices were savagely pulled to bits, soused with water, then buried in a muddy grave of wet sand. Circles of wide-eyed spectators watched some formalised sham-fights. But what these strange sights symbolised, I had no idea. It was enough to watch. . . . In a haze of churned-up dust hawkers sold bouquets of magenta and white paper roses and brilliant striped sweets. Orange-coloured curries were being cooked over glowing cinders.

Here was much for the eyes and much for the imagination. I was

constantly amazed, for example, by the beauty of the people themselves. Women's faces, peeping from tinselled draperies, reminded me of doves; their bodies were as compact and firm as bronze statuettes. The good looks of some of the men seemed almost alarmingly arrogant; but others, oblivious of their haunted, haunting beauty, could not understand why a European should wish to stare at their eyes, or admire their lank hair like the foliage of water plants, or the extraordinarily aristocratic distinction of their limbs and features. The squatting positions they assumed, knees drawn up to chin, as they rested or meditated, reminded me of the bird world.

More delays. Much brilliant work comes from Delhi. No finer example could be found than that set by the Viceroy. He is a paragon of truthfulness and deliberate fairness, industriousness, executive efficiency and courage. The Indian Civil Servants have an uncanny sense of political reality; there are many anonymous, but none the less important cogs, without whom the wheels could not rotate, who toil goodhumouredly in the face of much opposition, criticism and the disadvantage of a thoroughly noxious climate. New Delhi has come in for a great deal of opprobrium; brickbats aimed in certain directions are apt to hit the wrong target. There are, in Delhi, certain strata of people, individually unimportant, who by their frivolity and thoughtlessness create, especially among the men who are fighting in the awful conditions of the Burma Front, a certain rancour. The cry is heard that, despite the activity at Headquarters, Delhi is too far behind the front line of War. Yet it is unfair to expect those who have not lived in the fighting areas to act with the same determination as those who have. All the aids to escapism are available in Delhi. There is small chance of a flying bomb; European food is plentiful; no shortage of manpower, servants galore, countless boys to preserve the tennis court and pick up the balls for the players, masses of old men to water the herbaceous borders, which are a blaze of dull pink, bright orange, butcher blue—a seedman's triumph perhaps, but utterly hideous. There is little noise and the lack of traffic, except for the tinkles of bicycles at luncheon time, gives an air of leisure and prosperity.

Inside many of the freshly painted villas, one might be transplanted to the Great West Road, with nice easy chairs covered with chintz and a bunch of Cape Gooseberries in an art-pot on the modernistic tiled mantelpiece. There are no beggars or shoe-shiners—India is banished successfully, except for the crocodile of ants which winds itself along the bathroom walls, and the mongoose running across the drawing-room floor. Many an officer or government servant and his wife live here in greater comfort than that to which they were accustomed at home. In Welwyn Garden City they would have rallied with their neighbours to keep a stiff upper lip, and their tails high in the face of odds: it is merely pathetic if, after a long sojourn in this Oriental Garden City, they are almost driven flesh-potty. In such an erosive atmosphere it takes a strong man to maintain his balance and a sense of perspective.

Some glib criticism has been tossed around about the state in which the Viceroy's House is said to be maintained. However I was impressed by

the style and economy in which the great household not only conforms to wartime standards but appeals to the Indian love of "Bhari Tamasha" (meaning "grand display"). Arriving from England in the depths of the fifth winter of total war, it was extraordinary to see such sun, glitter and colour, so many flowers. I was immensely struck by the presence of so many servants of different categories, in scarlet, white and gold liveries, standing about like poppies behind chairs and tables, or in the distance of endless halls and marble enfilades, looking as small as "personages" in a landscape. But soon I realised the Comptroller had the "Bhari Tamasha" well under control.

In the Viceroy's House three hundred servants are employed. When considering this number you must realise that, due to the caste-system, different communities are allotted various categories of work, and that it is impossible and irregular for a man to substitute for another; thus six servants are needed to do the work undertaken in England to-day by one heroic aged peeress. Any Englishman, living however quietly and simply in India, will have at least six servants—a cook, a butler, a laundryman, a sweeper, a groom, a gardener and perhaps one other. Even so he will be poorly attended, his bungalow dirty, food badly cooked; each servant, willing to do only one specific job, is inadequately trained and incompetent. If an Englishman is to work hard in this devitalising climate he must preserve his energy and leave his servants to do some of the physical work he would undertake in England.

The pretentious buildings of the Viceroy's House and the Secretariat are of no known style. Made of tongue-coloured stone, which retains the dry heat of the day and throws it out angrily at dusk, they appear, at the far end of a processional drive, like a city built for an exhibition. They were designed for peacetime activities, but few modern cities could be less practical or convenient for a war headquarters than the present Capital.

These domed and turreted buildings have had jerry-built beaver-board excrescences added to accommodate, by day, the vast staffs who, by night, must sleep in tents, which, five minutes after a tropical downpour, are flooded, or, in the heat of summer, resemble a furnace. Living space is so scarce in New Delhi that even the migration of South-East Asia Command to Ceylon did not appreciably alleviate the discomfort. The long, empty avenues and spacious vistas may be advantageous for a processional drive of the Commander-in-Chief and his wife, accompanied by outriders, staff cars and police, but the ordinary soldier with a staff job, journeying backwards and forwards to his desk four times a day, dislikes these distances. Even to-day there is no adequate tram or 'bus service to Old Delhi; those unable to find accommodation in the New Town must cover the distance of seven miles by bicycle, for a tonga moves almost as





Imperial Delhi

© 1994 by the author



Moslem and Sikh
Troops taking the
Oath

slowly as the proverbial bullock-cart, while the cost of a taxi is out of question.

Hours of work throughout the year are long, for no siesta is encouraged in Delhi. By the end of the hot season, tempers are short and nerves are frayed.

The general effect of New Delhi is of a complacent yet callous centre, without gaiety or the strength for cruelty; a heartless, bloodless Display-City, without a past or the necessary roots to develop a future.

After the usual dawn delays at the airport, I set off for the North-West Frontier. We landed at a small place named Cheklala.

Darkness was now upon us; the weather had "closed down" for further flying. Here we must remain. I was a stranger. No one knew of my arrival—yet, in a few seconds of landing, with that extraordinary generosity shown to outsiders by the R.A.F., I found myself whisked off for a drink in the Mess, and forthwith taken to the home of an unknown young man, who made himself responsible for all my needs. He turned out of his room so that I should spend the night in the more comfortable bed. I was dosed with his precious whiskey. I was motored to Rawalpindi, introduced to his friends at the Club, given the best dinner I had eaten since the war began (a steak as thick as a dictionary), shown the local belles in full evening dresses at a Charity Dance—in fact, was presented to all the glitter of this famous Station, now used as a training ground for India Command. Next day, many and various methods of instruction were displayed. Gurkhas, in crash helmets, were doing a course of parachute landing: the aircraft circled over a ploughed field: one by one the umbrellas opened in the sky: they appeared suddenly like frog-spawn or undersea life. The stiff figures swayed from side to side as they descended, like those dreadful dolls that used to hang in the back-windows of the automobiles of travelling salesmen. A somersault—they disentangled themselves from their skeins and staggered through the mud for a mug of tea at the mobile canteen.

At Nowshera I was impressed to see one dozen English officers mostly in their twenties, in the process of training three thousand Sikhs, recruited from the neighbouring villages. It was interesting to see the latest arrivals, very willowy in their dhotis and puggaris, and to compare them with the stalwart batch that had arrived only seven days ago. In one afternoon I watched the classes of men at all stages of training. Some were boxing, the onion-shaped knob of hair that their religion demands coming down during bouts and causing the contestants to look like Edwardian ladies; boys were throwing grenades, working on transport repairs, using bayonets, and finally, after a year's training, were at the Passing Out Ceremony, incredibly efficient, swearing the Oath of Allegiance on the Koran Sharif, or the Sikh Bible, carried aloft on purple and yellow cushions.

Everywhere I visited I was welcomed in such a friendly manner that I should feel ungenerous were I to give the impression that I was disappointed in my first fleeting glance at this remarkable corner of the

Earth. I met men whose life had been spent here, and others who resented being stationed so far from the front line. A General, who showed me much hospitality, and who had been through the fiercest fighting in Burma, lost all his possessions there, and was fortunate to have escaped, said he regretted being considered too old to continue the fight against the Japs. "I would like to fight them," he told me, "knowing for once that the airplane above my head may be ours and not theirs." He chafed against his bars in this remote prison, and was disappointed to find here so much apathy, local gossip and pettiness. One young officer confided that he spent his spare cash as conscience money on sending books to the troops in Burma.

The town of Peshawar has been sacked so many times that nothing of architectural interest remains. But the streets are crowded with interesting types—Asiatics, Pathans and many Persians. The shops are a series of enthralling, enlarged peep-shows. The fruit-seller kneels on his prettily built structure of brilliant materials—oranges, melons, magenta aubergines. The hatter squats among the bead and tinsel headdresses, made especially for a bridegroom. The florist is busy stringing garlands of white, peppermint-pink and orange flowers for a woman's wrist or ankles, or for a horse's head. Bright and spectacular shops display dazzling jewellery, brilliantly coloured bed-posts like toys, Ali Baba pots of brass for incense or pungent and warm perfumes, and stolen goods. The grain shops look like miniature models of mountain ranges. Most mysterious of all is the "flour-sifter" on his white stage; he wears a white smock and a white dunce's cap, his face, beard and eyelashes are powdered white, his sieves and strings are covered with a frosty film, and he stares back amusedly as we gaze at him as if he were from some other world.

My escort, perhaps in an attempt to create an air of excitement, explained that, if the police should turn its back for ten minutes, the place would be in an uproar; that here we were surrounded by a fermenting mass of the world's most dangerous characters. That evening, however, everyone seemed agreeably inquisitive. "Of course it seems quiet here to-night," said my guide. "But you never know when it will be necessary to turn on the Tear Gas again. This is a tough corner of the Earth. No value is given to a man's life. You notice everyone carries a gun; robbery, hold-ups, murder and rape are not uncommon." He spoke of the "possible dangers" with a certain relish.

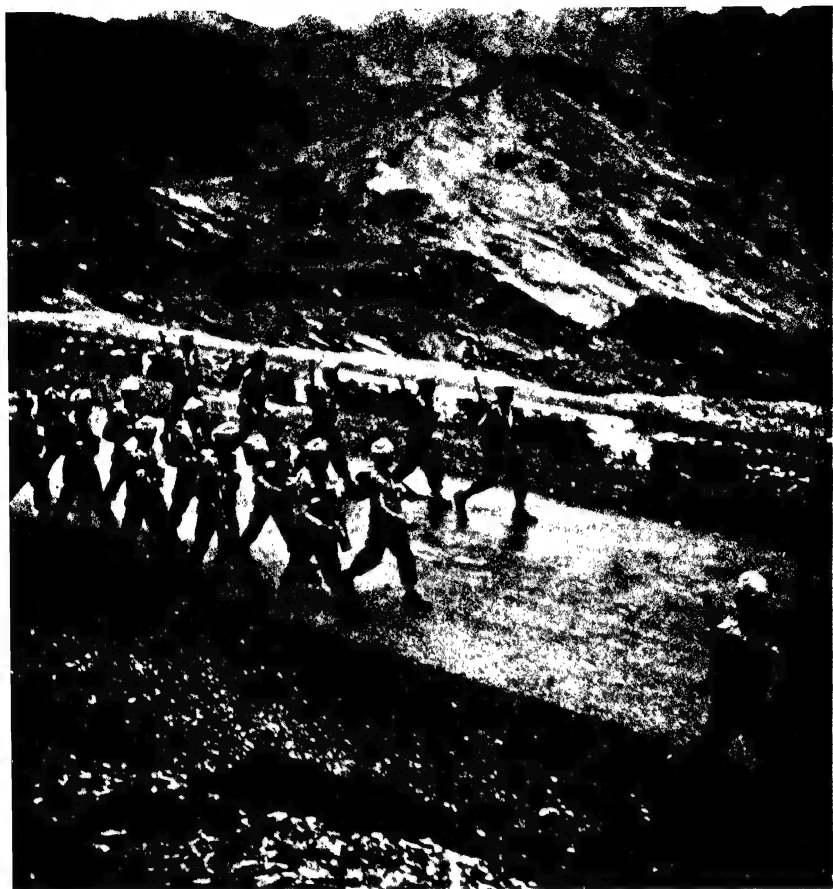
"You see that type—there?" he added, pointing out a rather pathetic looking man who was deliberating in front of a sigillated tea-cloth. "Well he's one of the worst types—bloodthirsty scoundrel."

In high expectation, and in a torrential downpour, I set off for Landi Kotl and the Khyber Pass. Scenery was on a gigantic scale, without a blade of grass; beneath lowering skies these slatey mountains looked even more formidable. The Fort Shagai, housing the Second Kashmir Infantry, combined for me all the least attractive features of a soldier's life: early calls for parades on the asphalt yard, draughty bare rooms, hard gritty ugliness. Alexander the Great and Timur the Tartar had chosen this path for their invasions of India; I felt nevertheless that the Khyber belonged rather to Kipling than to any earlier period of history. "Victorian improvements" had given it a Boer War aspect.



Ghurkas





Frontier Guards



A battalion of the Seventh Rajput Regiment went off down the hills, towards Afghanistan, on a tactical exercise in frontier warfare. Everywhere one moved one was watched by pickets looking down from camouflaged pillboxes on the mountain heights. I was depressed rather than impressed, and perhaps I did not show enough enthusiasm; for my escort continued: "You must understand what a poor life these tribesmen lead. They see, next to them, the most fertile plains of all India, yielding four crops a year; they cannot help coveting such richness, and they make continuous short, sharp sorties to grab a bit of someone else's wealth. The hostile tribal territory here is always a problem; and the terrain makes it impossible to winkle them out of their caves without an enormous expeditionary force."

"Perhaps they are rather a good buffer between India and Afghanistan?" I suggested.

"Oh, they provide us with a lot of fun. It's a great life—hard, but it's masculine: not a woman in sight."

My friend then told me about the Fakir Ipi, who, as a young clerk, was sacked from a Government Office and ever since, inspired by a fanatical hatred of Britain, has been making trouble for us. For many years we have tried to capture him. We know where he is, but he never comes out into the open; and none of his followers has been found willing to deliver him up. Although he has been quiet lately, trouble is always expected. "He's got his own arms-factory underground, you know; and no doubt he is paid by the Axis for kicking up shindies and keeping our troops busy on the frontier. But he's over fifty and suffers from asthma, so perhaps it won't be long now. By the way, you heard about Richardson?"

"No, what happened to him?"

"Well, he was sitting by his window—Phft! The light was shot out." My friend explained how a wild tribesman had missed his mark. Pickets were sent out; extra care taken by the police; scouts sent to protect the traffic on the mountain road from guerillas who might be lurking there with home-made rifles. There might be some subsequent potting from behind boulders.

Later, I saw a group of the wild Wazirs, whose activities had at one time considerable nuisance value. I have seen "Carmen" and "The Maid of the Mountains" on tour, and can recognise a third-rate chorus of operetta brigands. Here they were again, after all these years; with unkempt beards and dirty undergarments swathed round their shaggy heads. One wore a long green tweed overcoat of loud check with emerald celluloid buttons, obviously bought in a bargain basement; another sported an old tail-coat. Toothless, squinting, stunted, with inane grins—a more hopeless bunch of delinquents it would have been impossible to imagine.

I went down the "Open Road" guarded by the Tochi Scouts. I watched guards signalling from slope to slope and saw, on the peaks of these gaunt hills, white sheets placed as indications to aircraft. I saw the Scouts, with the agility of goats, scaling in thirty-nine minutes a height that would take a white man two and a half hours to achieve.

Back in the Officers' Mess, polished silver cups stood in rows against the dark oak panelling. Another round was ordered—"Yes, we get beer

from the factory at Pindi—or how about a cherry brandy?” A young subaltern came in and laid his revolver on the table, by the reading lamp with the crimson silk shade. “Heard about old Claude’s near shave? His lamp shot to blazes! Great stuff—maybe the beginning of something.”

Life on the North-West Frontier has changed very little since the Victorian age, when warfare was so well-conducted as to seem comparatively civilized. The subnormal mountaineers are still a nuisance; but, after all, they are the inspiration of a thousand mess-room stories. A hundred years ago, this Frontier possessed a romantic quality, which it has largely lost since the invention of more modern forms of frightfulness—the flame-throwing tank and the flying bomb.

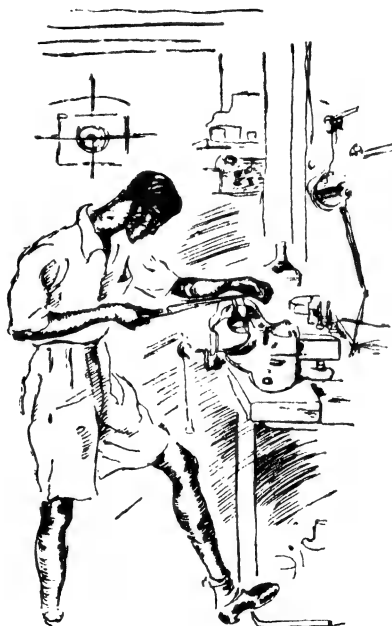
It was time to leave. We called upon the Station Commander. No, he did not think there would be a chance of the aircraft arriving in such bad weather; certainly none of its taking off. But while the Meteorological people were making gloomy forecasts, explaining that this greyness might keep up for several days, the duty pilot announced the arrival of our aircraft. We motored out on the tarmac. “Okay, we go in half an hour,” the little Indian pilot shouted.

Again I was the only passenger in the aircraft, and concentrated very hard on my novel as we rose into the pewter skies. We bumped about in a steely vacuum, passed through the storms and came out into ambiguous calm. I soon noticed, however, that the pilot was trying very hard to unwind a wheel—something to do with pumping down the under-carriage when the automatic release goes wrong. It proved too stiff; try as he might, he could not get it down. Now we were flying over nasty, tooth-like rocks, and into large lumps of dirty cotton-wool cloud. The little Indian was sweating as he struggled with the levers. Since my crash I have lost my former sublime confidence in the infallibility of aircraft, and am conscious of the slightest irregularities in the rhythmic sound of the engines. When the pilot first beckoned me to join him in the cockpit I shook my head and winked—No, I had had enough of the cockpit: I would remain with my novel! The pilot continued to beckon; and it was only after a considerable time that I understood that the invitation had now become an order. Imagine my dismay when I discovered the pilot was signalling for me to sit by him in the cockpit, to “take the stick”. I had never been shown what to do with the controls. I felt like Harold Lloyd flying an airplane for the first time, and contemplated even having to climb out on the wings, to tie something together with string. I held on to the wheel rather gingerly, not knowing how much leeway I could allow before the aircraft reacted violently. Like a monkey, the sweating pilot crawled to and fro, among the hundred gadgets on the dashboard and the floor. The engine responded to my very tentative suggestion to climb a little higher, and I found this effort a relief.

After an eternity, the pilot put up his thumb with a jerk: he had mended the airplane: perhaps he had tied it together with string and a safety-pin. “Okay.”

“ May I go back to my novel? ”

Thumb up again. The relief was tremendous. When we circled over Lahore Air Station, however, it seemed the thumb-jerk had been premature. As we came in to land, and were just about to touch down, we shot up again high into the air. The under-carriage was not lowered. We “stooged” around the airfield, while the pilot tried to unwind the under-carriage. He kept re-adjusting fuses: we circled many times, looking down wistfully at the strip below. The pilot took control again. Perhaps he had decided to “do a pancake” without the landing gear? Here goes. I looked around for the quickest means of escape—in which direction would I be thrown?—and adopted several suitable poses in which to receive the shock. But all went well. We skimmed low, bumped, and were relieved to find the under-carriage was in position. Only the wing-flaps were not working, so that our speed was greater than usual, and again and again we bounced high like a rubber ball. But we were safe on land. I had been so frightened that I felt as if I were suffering from prickly heat; my hands were sweating, and I had a painful weakness in the small of the back.



CHAPTER III

CALCUTTA

CALCUTTA, the second largest city of the Empire and the former Capital of India, is an ugly, dirty and unhappy city. There are many splendid parks, tropical gardens, squares adorned with Edwardian statues, and florid commercial edifices of unknown styles; and there are many enchanting eighteenth-century buildings. But the overcrowding, the poverty and shabbiness are distressing. Only fifteen paces across the main thoroughfare, opposite the most elegant European hotels, village-like groups are clustered around the fires, over which heavily spiced food and bits of fish are being fried in grease under the trees, while hordes of rats scurry to and fro, and scavenger dogs and enormous crows take an interest in the refuse bins. Ladies in opalescent evening dress, each at the beginning of the evening the proud possessor of a well-starched escort, take themselves to the Philharmonic Concerts on Sunday evenings, where the Indians present a dazzling display of jewels. A few hundred yards away, at the Kalighat, the most primitive scenes of worship in all India are to be seen. Calcutta seems doomed to disaster. The climate, perhaps the most unhealthy of any town in India, may be responsible for the weakness, indolence and apathy of so many of its inhabitants.

It seems that during wartime the most agreeable (and the easiest) way of attacking the British Government is *via* Bengal. To launch a more direct onslaught might be considered ill-timed and unpatriotic. But Bengal is a permissible target, and a large number of strangers have acquired a militant determination that England shall alone be made responsible for disasters which are not so much the result of short sightedness and callousness, as of a series of separate mishaps, uniting to aggravate a situation already complex and difficult. The visitor to Calcutta soon becomes aware that the recent famine gave opportunities for a shocking display of avarice, selfishness and almost inhuman apathy among the people themselves. It is not easy to help someone who will not help himself. One need only read the descriptions of Indian famine written in the eighteenth century by William Hickey to see that the Bengali mentality has not changed, and that such wholesale tragedies may periodically recur.

"Nothing," wrote Hickey, "would stop the unhappy famished wretches from rushing in crowds to Calcutta, the neighbourhood of which became dreadful to behold. One could not stir out of doors without encountering the most shocking objects, the poor starved people lying dead and dying in every street and road. It was computed that for many weeks no less than fifty died daily, yet this patient and mild race never committed the least act of violence, no houses or go-downs were broken into to procure rice, no exclamations or noisy cries made for assistance; all with that gentle resignation so peculiar to the natives of India, submitting to their fate and laying themselves down to die. Everything in the power of liberal individuals was done for their relief: indeed, one must

have been less than mean, absolute Buonapartes, to have witnessed such horrible scenes of misery without feeling the bitterest pangs and exciting every nerve to alleviate them."

To-day Calcutta, so recently recovered from famine, is thriving. Fortunes are being made. Directors of firms are "reserved" from the army, and in the end, no doubt, receive knighthoods. Calcutta is known as the city of "dreadful Knights". Moreover, it is now a sort of oriental Clapham Junction. Air Commodores, Generals and celebrities of every kind and race spend the night at one of the overcrowded hotels or at the vast Caravanserai of Government House. Most of the men of the Fourteenth Army spend their leave here. In their bush-hats and shorts they crowd out the hostels, canteens, air-conditioned cinemas, cafés, milk-bars and "attractions" along Chowringhee. It is a thrilling experience, after years in jungle foxholes, to walk along stone pavements, to gaze up at tall jostling buildings and to sleep all night in solidly constructed edifices. After listening to the whispers of the jungle, the violent noises of the town come as a relief. Calcutta provides plenty of noise: the tick-ticking and thunder-rolling of the trams, the honking of taxis—for Sikhs always drive with the horn—the bells of the rickshaws and the incessant caw-cawing of the crows which circle above.

The crowded streets provide every sort of contrast. Poles wander in search of distraction; American sailors, with cigars at an insolent angle in their mouths, buy silk kimonos embroidered with dragons, or the Taj Mahal in sequins; British Tommies rather clumsily finger the bookstalls for semi-pornographic literature: there is a choice between "The Seven Pillars of Foolishness", "Gone with the Monsoon", "The Art of Love" or "Erotic Edna".

In the markets are to be found all the oriental junk that Birmingham can produce; carved ivory by the ton, engraved metal and elaborate enamelling. Rare animals of the jungle are brought together under the glass roof of the market: caged birds of all colours and sizes, and pathetic monkeys in crates. Some black, long-haired monkeys have eyes like wallflowers and the dignity of saints. A young boy, holding a birdcage, pauses a moment to rearrange his coloured girdle; another is sitting upon a trestle, sharing it with a goat and many vegetables; a young Hercules saunters by, balancing an enormous wardrobe on his turbanned head. One forgets how beautiful the human body can be until one sees it with the draperies so enticingly arranged.

To walk down the tiered flower-stalls is as exciting as a play: roses of varying charm and personality; bundles of white daisies like clouds; the first mauve orchids. There are flowers virginal or mock-virginal, some suggesting muslin, others confectioners' sugar. In the secondhand market you find eighteenth-century furniture brought out by the old sailing ships, and Victorian bedheads, covered with a thick coating of treacly gilt, or with the glutinous mahogany polish that the Indian loves so much. The signs painted above the fronts in Bow Bazaar are often startling: "Specialist in Piles", "Specialist in Wet Dreams". There is much evidence of the wish to become white-skinned—creams are advertised that will make you like a lily.

Thousands of worshippers, night and day, are busy in the humid turmoil,

purchasing silver-paper treasures, praying or washing themselves in the holy waters near the site of the Temple in Nonsur, of the Goddess Kali, the wife of Siva, or festooning white flowers over the ugly images. A goat is blessed; holy water is poured over it, and other attentions are paid: it is whisked to the stocks; its head clamped, it gives forth its last terrified bleats. Drums roll. With a terrific swirl the knife descends. The head is severed from the body; both lie twitching and spurting blood. The crows come down quickly to peck, but they have little luck; the blood dries very quickly in the sun, and soon becomes a black stain on the paving.

Around the Kali Temples, the sacred waters, the tree of fecundity, Miss Mayo has done her job. Perhaps she has not stressed the great beauty of the scene, blazing with aniline colour during the day, phosphorescent in the moonlight. In the midst of its squalor, Calcutta provides strange and unexpected glimpses of beauty. In the ugly heat of the day, a young man, in rags, sits in an alcove of the wall outside Government House, oblivious of the raucous noise and the clanging traffic, idyllically playing a lute. In the "Victoria School", the young girls look like little statues, their heads bent forward and palms clasped as they make obeisance to the teacher. I have never seen so many exquisite, kitten-like creatures gathered together in one room, each with her own brand of beauty, but all distinguished by the same magnolia texture of skin, velvet eyes and lacquered simplicity of hair.

Adjacent to the tramlines, the cemetery, the tombs and mausoleums of the eighteenth-century English pioneers, is a most hauntingly beautiful and strange confusion of Georgian and Oriental architecture, obelisks, pyramids, temples, among them the pathetic resting place of Rose Aylmer, with huge birds flying above, and frogs croaking underfoot.

The great Jain Temple, in a compound containing a series of architectural mad-houses, is the apotheosis of bad taste. Brought from far and wide to be jumbled together, is a preposterous collection of objects, *bric-à-brac* European and Oriental. The result is defiant and amusing. In the brilliant sun, statues of potentates and ugly children, in startling white marble, with black inlaid pupils to their staring eyes, stand up under pagodas of painted wire, on mosaic-work pedestals. There are wrought-iron garden chairs from Llandudno, Majolica elephants from Birmingham, many turquoise-roofed temples, all of a Turkish Delight prettiness, pavilions that might have come from Brighton Pier, inlaid with coloured glass, stones and mirror work, like the most expensive nougat. The whole effect is as gay as the tinkles in the Czechoslovakian chandeliers: a suitable setting for an Opera Bouffe.

On the banks of the Hooghly River there is a piece of land endowed for the Sadhus. Having given up all worldly possessions, these holy men satisfy their frugal wants by begging, and cover themselves with an ash that contains a sulphur which makes their naked bodies impervious to changes of heat or cold. They practise Yogi, and each morning go down to the Hooghly to bathe and do their muscular exercises, using the river water to irrigate their bowels. The fact that they spend most of their

time smoking hemp and hashish does not affect their physique; the bodies of even the older men are wonderfully lithe and energetic. Some of them laugh mischievously, peep and leer around corners. The young men with their long bleached hair hanging below their shoulders, naked but for a scarlet jockstrap, with their skin powdered half-elephant, half-circus performer, look more like devils than holy men. One naked young man, with his wild hair flowing behind him, comes charging down to the water astride a great bull. An old man with one eye, one tooth, and hair growing in plaits yards long, reads from the Holy Book. He is the head Sadhu. To bask and bathe in his blessed presence many visitors from the town have come to sit cross-legged and silent in front of him. A nine-year-old-boy, with grey powdered face and hair, in scarlet draperies, looking like an angel painted by Signorelli, sits in the Lotus position, playing an enormous musical zither twice his size. This child has a remarkable passivity that is very moving. His dank, dark and dirty surroundings make him appear even more strangely pure and beatific. For the atmosphere is faintly vicious and sinister, though maybe it is only the feckless, rather uncanny, laughter of the youths that give one that impression. The old man explained that it was unfortunate we had elected to visit him on a day when so many of his number were away: twenty of them had gone to Nepal. I did not realise that this meant that they had gone begging their way on foot, and that it would take them a whole year to reach their destination.

I began to realise the size of the country known as India. Place the map of the Peninsula over that of Europe and one discovers that from Delhi to Calcutta is the same distance as from London to Danzig. From Delhi to Bombay is the same as from London to Rome. From the snowy heights of the Himalayas southwards to the ocean is a distance of two thousand miles, and the width of India from the Khyber Pass to the Eastern border is nineteen hundred miles.

Bengal is the largest jute producing country in the world. The raw material is stacked in thousands of aerodrome-hangar-like storehouses. A dozen Indians grunt and groan, or shout as they load the heavy cubes on to the backs of two human runners. The cubes are then dumped on to a small railway train which is driven into the factory. A jute mill is a gratifying sight that leaves nothing to the imagination, for one sees all the various stages by which the finished product is achieved; and the different scenes are pleasing to the eye. Even the jute itself is a sympathetic substance, like pale pussy-willow-coloured silk.

I had heard that the Scots overseers were hard task-masters and I had imagined that the conditions would be appalling; but, although the noise was tremendous, a dry peppery smell everywhere, and the air filled with fluff, the atmosphere seemed cheerful and sympathetic. Many of the workers are from the country. While they are working in the factory they lead a bachelor life in barracks, but for three months of the year they return to their wives. To follow one piece of jute through the factory is a most illuminating experience. After the long horse-tails of fibre have

been whisked into a rubber gyrating trough, they are waved into tresses, like marcelled hair; next they are whirled around on spools like tops, then threaded into a spider's web of strings. Now they are jerked into a violent loom, from which they emerge as immaculate lion-coloured cloth. Men, with elaborate nether draperies, fold the cloth into giant dinner-napkins. These are stacked, cut and sewn into sacks by squatting women. Rows of women, heavily jewelled and in draperies that run the gamut of wine colour and amber, line up like caryatides, their stitching finished and the sacks on their heads, to deliver their work. The sacks are clamped in metal strands; they are packed tight, and sent up in cranes over the Hooghly river to be dumped into the boats below and taken to the most distant parts of the world, to be used for packing food or making sand-bags. More recently, these factories have provided the tents that protect the army on the Burma Front.

In a neighbourhood of cheap modernistic apartment-houses, of honey-comb tenement-buildings that seem so unsuitable for the climate of India, I visited the house of an Indian poet. I was struck by its peaceful beauty and simplicity; the atmosphere was one of an extraordinary sweetness and purity. Transparent dhotis and white saris, freshly laundered, were hanging from the landings and balcony, as emblems of cleanliness: the golden ewers sparkled in the washroom: the stark, almost empty bedroom, with the poet's children asleep, was innocent of all the unnecessary and stuffy impediments of a humble room in the Western World. Here were no cluttered drawers, here were the essentials alone; and yet, when I wanted, of all things, a tripod, the poet was able to produce it.

Off a side street, in his studio, sits Jaminy Roy. He looks like a long baked potato, nestling in a napkin, in his immaculate white muslin. In front of him, on the floor, are many bowls of different colours. He paints as if he were making decorations on pottery. Once he was an academic portraitist; but Jaminy Roy was dissatisfied with the oily, fulsome likenesses of rich people that he was able to reproduce with facility and technical skill. He retired to a small village, studied Matisse and other modern painters, made his own water colours and started to paint in a brilliant and vital manner. After many years of poverty and hardship he is now considered India's best modern painter. His pictures are bold and simple. But he produces too much at too little cost to himself.

In a gun and shell factory, where supplies are made for the war in Burma, the atmosphere is little different from that in any such factory throughout England: it is as clean, no more, no less, the manager as impersonal. But the Indian workers seem better suited to precise and continuous tasks than workers of a more volatile and restless temperament. One sixteen year old boy was at work planing and filing a small part of a gun; the delicacy and sympathy of his hands, the coolness of his gestures and the meek



Wedding-cake Architecture : Jain Temple, Calcutta



Calcutta Hospital and
A.R.P. Lecture

intensity with which he laboured, were very touching to watch. The employees here are given periodic propaganda talks, but few of them have any hatred for the Japs, or any real idea about the war. Most of them are working because they are paid good money. As workers, they do what they are told with prodigious powers of application. It is doubtful



Shell Factory, Calcutta

whether their efficiency would be greater if they had the cause at heart. In another huge factory, in the heart of Calcutta, precision instruments, optical lenses, telescopes and gun-sights are made. Some of those employed here are fourth-generation employees, descendants of those who have been associated with the firm since its inception at the time of the East India Company.

The Governor had prorogued Parliament. There had been such disorderly scenes in the Legislative Assembly that it was decided to curtail them. I went to hear the final flurry.

An "Alice in Wonderland" mad-house presented itself. Everyone at the same moment seemed to be shouting and beating the air. One man, with a voice like a siren, moaned above the others, demanding an opportunity to speak without interruptions. I noticed later that when others were speaking, he was the first to take the chance of raising a good old shindy. The Speaker, like a Grandville drawing of an insect, had a hard time trying to keep some semblance of order. He cried into a microphone, banging to no avail with his mallet. A dignified man, in a tarbush, kept shouting, "Mr. Speaker, may I go on? Oh, they won't listen!" he

wailed. "They don't want to hear truth and correct information—please Mr. Speaker, oh please prevent us from becoming a laughing stock."

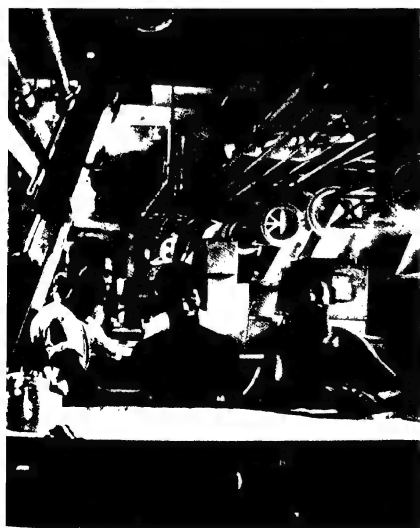
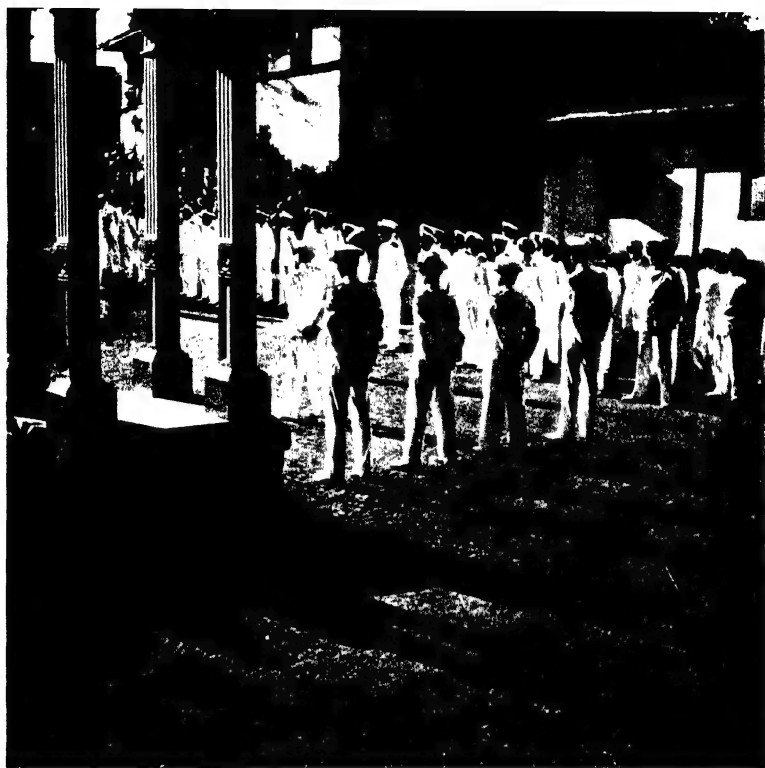
It was impossible for a stranger to follow proceedings. The metallic voices jerked out their English sentences in a timbre that was difficult to listen to; but the use made of the English language was refreshing.

A fat old man in a dhoti rose to his sandals and shouted: "This is most vexatious for the Honourable Minister!" Others took up the cry, "Vexatious, most vexatious!" Finally the minister, who was supposedly so vexed, rose and remarked deprecatingly, "I can assure you it is not vexatious. I am not easily vexed."

The Speaker gave hopeless rulings. The document from Government House, proroguing the Assembly, was greeted with shouts of "Ignorrrrit—ignorrrrit". The bedlam of noise and confusion rose to a crescendo, to be ended abruptly by the Speaker adjourning the house for fifteen minutes of prayer.

No ship bound for India sails straight to Madras or Calcutta; it calls first for orders at the embarkation port of Bombay. The gateway of India is the first glimpse that our troops have of this great peninsula. What can be their impressions? Is this India? The turreted square might be part of Liverpool or Edinburgh; these once prosperous looking red brick buildings are enlargements of Pont Street houses; the Town Hall, a classic edifice, might be seen anywhere throughout the world; and the rows of modern apartments, along the reclaimed land of the Back Bay, look like accumulators and have no nationality. The Taj Hotel is built back to front, and in the moonlight, with the electric lights reflected in the calm sea, it is reminiscent of Buda Peth. There is the Sassoon Library. There, reminiscent of the Great Exhibition, is the Crawford Market. Those imitation Trianons are the mansions of rich Parsis. There are old-fashioned clubs and modern hotels, synagogues, mosques, Buddhist chapels and the Towers of Silence where the vultures silently receive their meals at punctual intervals. Along the walls of the town, perched like monkeys on scaffolding at various heights, are Bombay's never idle artists, perpetrating huge garish posters that advertise anything from Nautch dancers to snow-white skin pigmentation. These adroitly painted faces of gargantuan proportion and cineraria complexions are one of the town's most personal features. Below, dwarfed by comparison, the crowds include women in brilliant saris, pince-nez, brown boots, and American and English sailors in white. Religious signs are painted on Hindu beads in the gutter. In the shade of a parasol attached to his white tunic, the policeman beckons to the oncoming traffic in a dashing uniform of navy-blue plus fours and yellow porkpie hat.

The Exhibition Stadium changes its attractions with necromantic speed. No sooner have the stalls been taken away from the "Grow More Food" exhibition, than the crowds arrive to watch the wrestling matches. Then, in a flash, a transformation takes place and the attractions are installed for a huge Red Cross Fun Fair. Allied service men, W.R.N.S. in tropical uniform, taciturn Indians in turbans and white Eton jackets, and Maharanees armed with diamond bracelets to the elbow, rubicund





Bombay Rice Supply

members of the Yacht Club, wearing white dinner-jackets with black trousers (whereas their counterparts in Calcutta wear black jackets and white trousers), enjoy the glow of coloured electric light bulbs, the gambling, the donkey races, the roller-coaster railways and the giant wheels which revolve high among the fronds of palm trees.

In another part of the town, forbidden to the troops, in rows behind their iron bars, the ladies of the night display their charms and to the highest bidder extend the key of their illuminated cage.

With its vast dockland, its miles of godowns that contain equipment of war, Bombay is the store-room for India Command. The Military Ordnance Depot is an incredible sight, with acre upon acre of tanks, armoured cars, DUKS and—perhaps equally precious—rubber tyres. Bombay is not self-sufficient; but its food problem has been tackled by an alert and far-seeing Government, who were the first to institute rationing schemes. In spite of the illiteracy of so large a proportion of the populace, control of grain, sugar and kerosene runs smoothly, without queues or disorder. Attached to the large factories and cotton mills are rice stores which are models of their kind. The mill areas stretch for miles into the country. Forty years ago almost every cotton garment worn in India was woven in Manchester; now Bombay supplies the goods. I am certain that the Indian mill-hands work in better conditions than their equivalents in England. Women workers can leave their children to be looked after in a cool, immaculate crèche in the care of ayahs, until they visit them at feeding time.

Less artificial than Delhi, less dirty than Calcutta, beautifully situated on the sea, Bombay cannot be considered an Asiatic City; but it is a throbbing Eastern metropolis that welcomes Western civilisation. It is the most cosmopolitan and emancipated city in India. In spite of its orchid house climate, its inhabitants seem to possess unflagging initiative and drive. Sects, clubs, associations and newspapers are legion. Bombay is also a great town for gambling—particularly among the Parsis. Many of those present at the race meeting each Saturday have dreamt about Doubles. "Of course the favourite will win," someone in the crowd is heard to say, "or the stewards will want to know why. . . ."

As the horses flash past, the crowd groans in a vast orgasm of excitement. The heat is terrific: a few of the young women are extremely decorative in their clear coloured saris; some of their menfolk, with tweed jackets worn over their muslin shirts, look messily indecent; but the general effect—the bright, coarse flowers set in stiff borders, the whites, greys, bright salmon and mauve pinks, with a distant rainbow in the sky—has the period charm of a Tissot painting.

On the far side of the white railings, a great altercation results from somebody not having cheated as much as he expected to do: the row is brought to a conclusion by a violent downpour of dramatic rain. In a flash the crowds have dispersed—not before getting soaked through. The drainage system does not allow for such a rainfall. Lawns are flooded, cars are waterlogged: a few straggling Indians paddle with battered umbrellas held aloft in one hand, shoes in the other; and husky B.O.R.S., like children at play, proceed by slow degrees, climbing along with their stomachs pressed to the railings.

CHAPTER IV

ASSAM, BURMA AND THE ARAKAN FRONT

WE landed in the bowl scooped between the mountains of Imphal. The year was at its best; sun all day; cold at night; the cherry trees in blossom, rhododendrons ablaze. Soon there would be orchids; the vast tropical trees would be transformed by these exotic parasites, and the troops would pick the blossoms and put them in their large brimmed hats. The impressions I received would have been far less pleasant had I arrived during the Monsoon period, which continues for nearly two-thirds of the year.

Living in small holes dug in the mountain sides, supplied by a narrow mule track which zigzags up and down the mountains for over three hundred miles from the nearest supply base, the men must exist soaked to the skin for weeks on end in an almost solid tropical rain. There is no chance of drying their clothes. In this fetid atmosphere to wear a mackintosh is to sweat so much that soon you are wet through. Boots are never dry, so that your toes begin to rot. Supplies suffer: the coarse flour breeds bugs. Mud reaches up to the thighs. Everything grows mouldy: even the bamboo poles grow internal fungus, and the smell of decay is everywhere. Transport becomes impossible and essential supplies have to be dropped by air. Yet, strange as it may seem, water is often short—the mountains are so steep that the rain shoots off the sides before it can be cupped—and washing is permitted only once in three days. The enormous trees, garlanded with festoons of moss, drip heavily, ceaselessly, for months on end. Mosquitos thrive, and the leeches appear in millions, wagging their heads from side to side in the elephant grass. They are small until they have feasted on human blood, when they swell to the size of your thumb. The soldiers have learnt that they will drop off if touched with a lighted cigarette; but, if you try to pull at their greasy black skin, the head remains embedded in your body and the wound becomes septic.

Jungle warfare, consisting as it does of lonely treks and skirmishes—at the most, men go out in twos and threes—demands the highest degree of courage on the part of each individual. Most men prefer desert warfare, although here there is shade, the roots and growths are a salutary substitute for fresh vegetables and a palatable addition to iron rations, and occasionally there is wild game. But the feeling of loneliness is greater; groups seldom trespass on one another's terrain. There is reassurance to be gained from fighting in numbers. Each man knows that, after a terrifying game of Blindman's Buff played through the coarse undergrowth, any encounter may end with a clash of knives. No quarter is asked or given. Every moment of the day each man must be on the alert; for the Jap sniper may be hidden behind that distant cliff, or in the nearest tree. There is the continual strain of listening for the sound of a footfall. Even during their sleep most men keep one ear open for the sounds of the night.

They develop a sixth sense, so that they can distinguish every animal step, the calls of the birds, the laughter of hyenas, the yells of jackals, the creak of bamboo, the snapping of a twig and the Aristophanic chorus of frogs and crickets. After a time, even the most robust may show signs of nervous stress. One man, hearing steps coming closer to his Basha, ran out in the dark and bayoneted a bear.

A man is lucky if he escapes for long the various fevers and sicknesses of the jungle. If he should become ill while on patrol behind the enemy lines, he is a liability to his fellows, and a strain on morale. Fortunately the possibilities and probabilities are not considered—"You don't think about anything but killing Japs. It's important to kill them, because then they can't kill you." On fronts nearer home the wounded have a chance of being repatriated; in Burma the wounded can hope, at best, for a bed in a Calcutta hospital. Yet many of these men have been "holding the fort", almost barehanded, for three or four, or even seven, ghastly years on end. Some of them were in the terrible evacuation from Burma. Most of them are hardened, trained, jungle fighters; and they know that, with their experience, they are not likely to be replaced, that they must bide their time for a decisive campaign, which is not likely to be fought now till the European war is won. Yet they grumble surprisingly little. Perhaps they are past grumbling. Many of them had become cynical—"We're just the blokes that are taken for granted." They have received little attention from the outside world; their activities do not make news. They know that, in comparison with the bitter fighting in other theatres, their job is on a small scale, can be considered one of endurance.

"What do people think at home about this particular war?" they would ask with wry smiles, "or don't they think?"—"Do they know we are fighting the Japs out here?"—"We're very far away. But have they forgotten us entirely?"

They had a reason for feeling neglected. Up to that time they had received little recognition from press or radio, and few visitors; the mail from home was spasmodic; and although the Viceroy himself has always made it his business to see that there should be no mail hold-ups, letters still did not receive priority, and the bags would remain for days en route while other cargo was unloaded. The mail from the United States, with an extra two thousand miles to travel, arrived with almost incredible expedition.

The arrival of the Supreme Commander, driving his own jeep, dispensing with all formality and showing a genuine sympathy for the troops, produced a rise in morale. Though incapable of "talking-down" to anyone, his spontaneous speeches were couched in the terms the men appreciate most: "I want you to see my mug—not that I think it's a good mug—but you must get to know your leader. Some of you chaps have been out here for three years—I've been out here for three weeks—and I, too, want to get back home."

Here are some pages from the diary that I kept:—

"We were awakened in the dark; shaving in a small basin in a cold semi-outdoor room was depressing. We started off for Tiddim in a fifteen-hundredweight lorry. The hearty onslaught of the captain of our

party, so early in the morning, was hard to bear. At breakfast he whistled through his teeth in imitation of a tram conductor, did other impersonations, and on the road shouted abuse in four-letter English words and in Urdu to our fellow-travellers. I have never seen a display of such physical energy sustained for so long.

"Our truck bounded about in a cloud of dust thrown up by the convoy of trucks ahead of us. The beauty of the tropical vegetation through which we passed was ruined by the coating of salmon-pink dust, churned by ceaseless traffic. The bamboos, their fronds of dead branches looking like fishing-rods, rose in a perfect pure arc. The high Peepul trees were festooned with ropes and garlands of other vegetation. After a couple of hours the real bumping started. These trucks are the least suitable vehicles for negotiating narrow ridges cut into the precipices of the mountain sides; but there was no jeep available. For hours we were tossed from one side of the truck to the other, thrown high in the air to land painfully on the little iron seat, or on the sharp edges of our baggage. When we went over especially big bumps, the luggage and tinned provisions were thrown with us. We bounced and bounded for the rest of the day, wondering if it were possible to survive so long without being sick, suffering an appalling headache, loosening some teeth or acquiring internal troubles. But the flesh is very strong. With only an interval of half an hour for a lunch meal, we continued in semicircles up or down a mountain side, over a surface of dust and potholes, for one hundred and sixty difficult miles.

"By degrees the sun had warmed the icy cold air; one side of the mountain became brilliant, the other half remaining black. Then the sun sank behind the hills where the Japs were in occupation, and everything became pitch black. Still we motored along the small ridges, past perpendicular drops of four hundred feet; sometimes a passing lorry scraped our mudguards. We stopped to be given a cup of tea, brewed on his primus stove, by an old man in the Signal Corps from Merseyside. He welcomed our company, and his revolting brew was hot and invigorating. He said Christmas out here had been lousy. They had been given breakfast in bed! But the cooks must have become over-excited, for lunch had not been ready until a quarter to four: then it had consisted of just the usual rations—some bully beef wrapped in pastry, but a double ration of rum. He had got his letters from home fairly promptly; but he was lonely here, and had been out too long.

"Our captain showed his exhaustion by shouting at passers-by even more violently. He had taken on the Herculean job of steering this heavy lorry around hundreds of hairpin bends throughout the day, and like Hitler's, his patience was now practically at an end. We barged, crashed, thudded, ricocheted on into the night. The mountains were dotted with the small glowing fires of native encampments. After many dark vicissitudes, with distant lorries approaching like glow-worms, and passing us in a crescendo of noise and blinding light, we at last arrived, under a starlit sky, on the top of a precipice covered with fir trees. We did some unpacking, sat over a fairly warm fire, and waited while the sure, but very slow, black servant prepared tea and sardines, and unrolled our beds."



Front-line Hospital





Jungle Cookhouse



"The captain awoke very early. From the moment he opened his eyes he was in tearing spirits and carried on an incessant ribald conversation, while I lay counting the number of silly schoolboy words in each sentence. When a patch of sun was reflected on to the wall by me, I felt things might improve. The sun soon filled the hut and took the chill off.

"I went out—with cramp in the neck as a result of a night spent lying on a wooden chair—into the frosty, brilliant blue mountains. Below, the procession of lorries was bringing up provisions in an unending stream. More provisions were being dropped by airplanes flying only a few yards above the fir trees. Boxes swayed down on diminutive parachutes, and bags of rice and arta (coarse flour) came hurtling through the air. Some of the Chins ran in alarm. Quite a lot of damage had been caused by these supplies crashing through a roof; two days ago a Chin was squashed flat.

"We started off to Divisional Headquarters, to the encampment where five thousand people live in rush-matted tents. Already their toilet had been disposed of; they were slick and polished as if for the parade-ground; shoes shiny, everyone immaculately shaved.

"Against the green surroundings of the jungle the face of a white man is seen easily at a distance; so faces are 'made-up' with dappled spots of blue and green grease. Corporal Mitchell, from Perthshire, looked like the original Bairnsfather 'Ole Bill'; in spite of his maquillage, he had carefully waxed the ends of his large moustaches. Tin hats are worn with sprays of tropical leaves threaded through their netting cover. The white turbans of the Punjabis are veiled with layers of coarse camouflage net: Sikhs appear as if from a ballet, their turbans covered with huge woolly tufts of green and blue; and the Gurkhas patrolling with mobile wireless sets, tall branches like wings on their shoulders as they lean forward to penetrate the undergrowth, look like a tropical Burnham Wood on its way to Dunsinane.

"The British gifts of improvisation had been fully exploited. Type-writers were buzzing, and the most elaborate systems of telephone and wireless were installed. But living conditions were almost savage. At night the men slept in fox-holes dug into the peat-like earth. The khaki dhobi (laundry) festooned the branches of the trees; the 'furniture' was made of the strangest objects, and the whole picture was reminiscent of a boys' adventure book. Everyone, young clerks and grey-haired Brigadiers alike, wore short trousers and romantic looking bush-hats. Everywhere was an ant-like activity. Up before sunrise, after working at highest pressure all day, men often find another batch of work that must be completed after the evening meal. This helps morale. At a place so remote—it is a ten days' journey to the nearest town—there is little else to do. Everyone was extraordinarily cheerful, though it was almost more than they could bear to ask for news of England. 'What's the blackout like?'—'Do they have enough to eat?'—'How's the bomb damage?'—they enquired rather shyly. When I told them that only five weeks ago I had been in England, they eyed me as if I were a creature from another planet. They touched my civilian jacket and said: 'Can't remember how long it is since we've seen tweeds.'

"After nightfall I sat in a cavern dug in the earth in front of a blazing

fire, talking to Colonel Younger, one of the men who helped to build the mountain road over which we had travelled.

“ ‘It’s a promenade now, compared to what it was a few weeks ago,’ he said. ‘While building the road, we lost only one jeep over the cud. Since the bulldozers have arrived, one of them went over the edge and the driver lost his arm, but the work has galloped ahead. The precision of their work is extraordinary. Those bulldozers do each day as much work as fifty Chins, though it is difficult to aggregate Chin manpower with women and children included. I’ll take you up to Kennedy Peak tomorrow; I’d like to show you the flowering trees on the way.’ He talked about the flowers and the orchids as if he were showing me around his garden in Sussex.

“ ‘We mustn’t be late for the guns,’ he said. We ran in the dark up the mountain side. It was cold at the outset, but we arrived at the summit out of breath, panting in the unaccustomed altitude.

“ ‘Two minutes to go—one minute to go—half a minute—FIRE!’ A twenty-five pounder gun let loose eight rounds. The noise hurt. It brought to the surface all the soft places in one’s body—the places where one’s teeth had been filled—the nerve centres and the dormant fibrocitis in the nape of the neck. The noise hurt the ear drums. The blackness of the night became vivid with the flashes.

“Even while fighting a most primitive form of warfare, far from civilisation, men on the Burma Front contrive to lead the life of cultivated persons. I had an agreeable dinner in ‘A’ Mess. A small flickering lamp does not encourage reading; but a group of men will sit up late in serious discussions that may continue for many nights on end.

“Early call: the misery of shaving from a tooth mug. We motored higher up the mountains in circles to see the 2-5 Gurkha Rifles, a Battery of 129 Field Regiment R.A. These guns occupy the highest ack ack gun site in the world, according to the men manning them.

“ ‘Must be pretty nippy at night, isn’t it?’

“ ‘Thirty degrees of frost,’ said Gunner Donovan of Hammersmith.

“ ‘What do you do about it?’

“ ‘Put up with it.’

“From Kennedy Peak a panorama of a gentian blue mountainous world lies below. A little way down the slope a young man sat with his Brigadier. He was reporting his experiences of the last seven days of patrol on foot behind the enemy lines. He pointed to the Japanese emplacements and, like all others here, knew the country so well that he was able to describe the distant mountain formations as if they were his homeland. ‘See that spear there—that hump—that bare patch—that saddle—that strip of straggly trees—that long cloud formation?’ And the Brigadier followed the directions through his field-glasses.

“We started off on the trip down the mountain. The Provost Marshal had misinformed us about the timing of the convoy’s departure. We found ourselves in a gigantic crocodile of trucks that were to accompany us throughout the journey home. One truck would break down: a halt along the roadside for all the others: a start: another halt: then another halt in the stream of traffic. It was impossible to pass on the narrow crags overhanging precipices. We waited in the ever-increasing dusty,

dry heat. By degrees the freshness and resistance were sapped from the body. Soon one was tired, and not cheered by the discovery that, after six hours, one had travelled only thirty miles. The captain's temper was an incentive to me to keep calm; with his efforts at the wheel of the truck I could only sympathise. The mere physical exertion of steering the wheel round the hairpin bends, the sudden stops and starts on the knife-edge precipices, with a drop of one thousand feet over the cud, was a terrible strain on nerves and physique. We trickled along the passes at a rate of five miles an hour, if we were lucky. In the increasing heat we would stop again for twenty-five minutes. On for five minutes, and then another twenty minute stop. One became obsessed by the problem of whether a far distant truck was or was not on the move. Although we did not give up trying, we could never pass any vehicle. In the distance, on the mountain above, the line of toy trucks would move along at a slow but steady pace, aggravating the chagrin of those stuck below. When, at last, we moved on, it was now at a rate of only three miles an hour. We were maddened to find that some soft-hearted booby in front was pushing on his bonnet a broken down truck, with the result that hundreds of vehicles behind must follow his pace. We managed to send a Military Policeman to bawl hell out of the Good Samaritan. We had still one hundred and thirty miles to go on appalling roads with incessant bends which our truck was unable to manœuvre without at least one reverse.

"How did one survive the eternity of the next ten or twelve hours? I learnt about the captain's life. To understand him was to make allowances. I had hated him bitterly at the outset of our trip, but my heart warmed towards him when one afternoon I found him poring over a map with his moth-eaten old servant, giving a lesson in geography. The old Chin had no idea which shape signified India, or where Burma was. He looked at various maps and made hopeless guesses. 'This is India. Where is Bombay?' The dark finger would point to the centre of the Peninsula.

"The captain had been a Regular, wounded in an arm and leg by the Japs; had been towed across a river in a net, which was kept afloat by empty bottles; had walked out of Burma on foot with a dozen others; nothing to eat—most of them had died from exposure and starvation on the way. Now he wished to return to his regiment, but was unfitted, and consequently soured; for soldiering was the only profession he knew.

"Mountain scenery never appeals to my heart; but I forced myself to enjoy the various textures of the earth, the stubble of the trees in the middle distance, the silky blue, lake-like distance. I watched the pleasing caligraphy of the various tree branches. In order to pass the time I tried to train myself to see the passing trees as certain painters would have conveyed them—Grünwaldt—Altdorfer—Corot—Samuel Palmer—Dufy.

"We went on and on, without a drink and without food. My thoughts would be far away when, suddenly, I would be brought back to earth by some obscene observation made by my companion. Later, in our grimy exasperation, the scenery appeared detestably dust covered. At twilight we stopped by an Indian Detachment, dipped our mugs into a cauldron of tea, and were given chips, fried in sizzling grease. I don't know if the

chips were made of real potato, but the substance was so rocklike that I cracked a piece off a tooth.

"Suddenly a great horde of pale moths appeared, like helicopters, in the air. They are the precursors of rain, and always come before the monsoons. In a few moments vast drops came beating down from the black clouds above the dark blue mountains. At once the roads were like chocolate blancmange. We skidded dangerously. We saw a truck that was balancing amidst the branches of a tree twenty feet over the cud, hanging above a thousand feet drop.

"For the last part of the trip I lay at the back of our truck on the luggage. A tarpaulin had been put over us when the deluge began; so I was sheltered here from the elements and left with my thoughts. I lay in the darkness reviewing my life, thinking about my friends and conjuring up the past. It was like choosing old gramophone records to play again. Time meant less than usual, but in fact there were still many hours to be passed before reaching our destination. In spite of the tremendous bumping about I slept; only occasionally was I hit hard enough upon the head to recover full consciousness. When, at last, we had driven down through mountains, pinpricked with the native camp fires, past bullock carts travelling at a snail's pace to the music of their bells, their drivers asleep, it was half-past four in the morning. We had been travelling for a stretch of sixteen and a half hours, and were very cold."

By far the worst setback I have experienced in my long photographic career happened to me at this time. I handed over a package of about two hundred and fifty undeveloped films I had exposed, to be sent back by air for processing in Delhi. They never arrived at their destination. The airplane which took them did not crash; the package was merely "mislaidd". Ceaseless, but nevertheless vain, attempts have been made to discover the precious parcel which, inadequately addressed, is still doubtless lying about in some waiting-room. A year has passed since then, and the chances are tragically small of my being able to fulfil my promise to my various sitters, to send them copies of their pictures. My apologies to the men living in jungle fox-holes, firing the twenty-five-pound guns, to the Howitzer teams, to the Gurkhas of the 7 Regiment, to the men of the Queens Regiment, the West Yorks, and the others who showed such enthusiasm and co-operation. Myself I regret the loss of these pictures, for they were taken while I was in full possession of my first enthusiasm and energy, and when, it seemed, such exceptional opportunities presented themselves to my camera lens.

Whereas the scenery among the Chin Hill reminds one a little of part of Scotland or California, the tablelands on the Arakan Front are unlike anything one has ever seen, except perhaps in the background of idylls and fantasies painted on Chinese fans, screens or porcelain. Around Maung daw it is as if the compact mountain ranges have erupted and dotted the



Supply Convoy climbing
through Burma



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through Burma





After the Battle, Arakan

earth with hundreds of rugged hillocks. These hillocks are covered by Peepul trees, spreading their huge, dark leaves, and by bamboos, while the feathery undergrowth is pierced by long white shafts of pampas. The landscape is pastoral; so lush, sylvan and peaceful is the general aspect in the brilliant sun or moonlight that, in spite of the intermittent thuds of gunfire, one cannot quite believe that deadly warfare is being carried on nearby.

We came unexpectedly upon a battle. During a picnic lunch in a ruined temple we heard gunfire. When we climbed a flight of stone steps to discover what was happening, two over-life-size black-satin crows swooped down from the magnolia trees and carried off the remainder of our meal. So we moved on, down a disused road, through an overgrown village, once bombed, now abandoned and looking like the garden of the Sleeping Beauty, with exotic creeping plants sprawling over the half-destroyed "bashas" and summer pavilions, over the gutted motor-car still parked in its neat, cement garage. On again we went, past the farm where, in a courtyard, provisions were dumped—tins of bully-beef and packages of biscuits lay among hundreds of small eggs, gourds and the exotic vegetation of the tropics.

A group of young officers, with serious expressions on their sunburnt faces, were discussing the situation. During the night some Japs had come down through that jungle range there, and had taken up their former positions which, inadvertently we had not filled in before advancing farther. Now this enemy group, with a two-pounder gun previously captured from us, was dug into the earth snug as moles, and able to do quite a lot of damage to our rearguard. Several men had been killed, and the wounded at this moment were being brought back under fire. The stretchers were placed in the Red Cross ambulances, which the drivers manipulated on the rough roads with dexterity and compassion.

A young major appeared, his khaki battledress stained with dark, dry splashes of blood. "We thought you'd been killed," the others greeted him. "Are you all right? Better have your arm seen to, and if you can cross that bridge, do so quickly and on all fours."

Meanwhile, in the fields of paddy, Indian women accompanied by their naked children were still working, unmindful of the bursts of shrapnel. Bombing by air alone will send them seeking shelter.

At the outset of this particular war the Jap had already perfected the technique of jungle warfare. His ruses were wily, and at first we fell into some of his traps. He was continually popping up in unexpected places. Since then, the Jap has made mistakes. We are now accustomed to his oft-repeated devices and are more adept than he at adopting the tactics of feint and surprise. It is we who are now holding back our fire from his sorties, only to turn it on later with great effect for the real attack. We now never attempt to storm a hill under fire from flanking hills, but rather infiltrate by the "back door". Our troops are no longer apprehensive of the Jap. The myth has been exploded that as a soldier he is super-human or inhuman. Admittedly, rather than be captured he will fight bitterly, for he knows that to be taken prisoner is to be without hope, to be written off as dead, never to return to his country. His orders are to kill himself rather than fall into enemy hands. But, it seems, life is sweet,

even to a Jap; often those who are taken prisoner, knowing they have little to expect from their own people, are willing to divulge secret information in the belief that they may be treated more favourably. Recently the Jap airmen have been equipped with parachutes, to be used only for baling out over their own terrain. There is a story of a Jap pilot being shot on his descent over our lines by an officious and outraged compatriot.

Here are a few more extracts from my diary:—

“It has been such a particularly lovely day to-day—the sky so blue, the sun bright, the air like crystal, that it was difficult to believe that as a result of these skirmishes tragedy would soon be visiting some families back at home. The magnolias are flowering; it is hard to remember that those two leaves gently falling from that bough have been snipped off by a shot from a Jap mortar getting into closer range.

“‘Quick, it’s time to move off,’ comes the warning. Yet the scenery makes it difficult to think of danger, or in terms other than those of holiday ‘camping-out’. There, waiting in the shade of those mimosa trees, the mules, heavily laden, look as if they are carrying up the provisions for a large ‘alfresco’ party. I did not realise this great packing-up of the company’s kit after the preliminary moving forward was, in fact, a step in the progress of the war, that our lines were advancing. When the howitzers, camouflaged with every variety of branch, are fired and the whole hill quakes, it is as surprising as if hidden guns were fired among the rhododendron bushes at a garden party.

“On to a small town which a week ago we had wrested from the Japs. Previously it had been subjected to heavy bombing from both sides. Since the Japs took possession over a year ago no one has lived in the houses, which now droop dejectedly under a covering of tropical plants. The grass has grown everywhere—over the frontdoor steps, into the hall-way, into the shelters, pagodas and deserted temples. Strips of corrugated iron have been flung by bomb blast into the leafless trees and remain there, gesticulating like tortured souls. It is another Sleeping Beauty town, but there is no sleeping to be done here to-day. The Japs had bombed it again this morning, and when we arrived a battle was raging a few hundred yards away. We continued in an armoured car to watch the battle. An officer pointed—‘The Jap is hidden there in those bunkers. Although there are six of us to every Jap, still he sticks his ground with amazing tenacity. It takes time to winkle him out and kill him.’

“Among the paddy rice fields and the more open spaces the fighting has little of the aspect of modern warfare. The return to importance of cavalry, and the mules laden with ammunition, bring to the mind pictures of Stonewall Jackson and the Civil War. It is only when one sees the treatment of the wounded that one realises how conditions have improved. So impressed was the Army Commander by one forward hospital that he made the experiment of showing the troops the elaborate equipment that had been brought on muleback from three hundred miles away. He was not certain that some of the men might not be alarmed, but the experiment had the desired effect. The troops were tremendously impressed; they

saw the casualties receiving such careful attention that the unconscious terrors of being wounded were minimised.

"Some of the camouflage attempts are half-hearted: some tanks and armoured cars trundle along the open spaces, garlanded with dusty pine-tree branches, looking like old Christmas decorations. Overhead the enormous kitehawks were wheeling high in the sky, and a series of small, black cloud-puffs appeared and disappeared. Suddenly one realised that, higher than the birds, some Jap aircraft were flying amid our anti-aircraft shell-bursts.

"'You are instructed not to come out from cover to watch. If you wish to see the battle, your face must be hidden by leaves or camouflage net,' said the young officer, half-humorously. Our fighters were now in pursuit of the raiders, while, below, cattle were grazing and some white herons were hopping among the paddy fields.

"We called at a front line hospital. A lot of horrors. One man's face was contorted with pain as his multiple wounds were being dressed: a piece of shell had got him on the shin; this was particularly painful while the bandages were being taken off, but he suffered like a brave child. I felt rather weak, saying silly things like, 'It'll soon be better'. I daresay the psychology of the doctors is cleverer: they are quite rough, they rag their patients to their faces—' See him now? Well, he's a jolly sight different from what he was two days ago! It's a pity I put back that tip of his nose! It was hanging over his mouth when he came in. Bloody funny!' And the victim laughs, genuinely amused. The doctor confided that this man had only survived through his guts and determination; that most others would have given up and died. One Gurkha had been kicked in the face by a mule; the result was appalling to victim and beholder. The Indians suffer stoically. Some of the fellows in pyjamas with malaria said they would prefer not to be photographed, to wait until they were in battle-dress again. An ex-waiter from the Savoy begged me to go with him to photograph the grave of one of his friends, Corporal Silk, who, rather than let his comrades be wounded by a grenade that had started to sizzle in the undergrowth, had lain upon it. The ex-waiter, after eighteen months of bully beef, looked very wan, had lost three stone in weight, could not keep down any food. The doctors were looking after him as best they could, but it was impossible to give him what he needed most—a special diet.

"The work of the front line doctors is one of the epics of the war. For instance there is Dr. Seagrave, almost continuously operating under fire. The old man's hand would tremble until it touched the flesh of his patient, then he would slice the body open as if he were taking the rind off a cheese, delve into the entrails, scoop out the shrapnel, and start on the sewing up. That job finished, another would begin. A young man, who had been shot through the eyes, is brought in. 'No, he has been unlucky! He's just one that lowers the average. Too bad.' The old doctor shakes his head with a terrible look of anguish. It was as if he had never before seen such tragedy. Then the next case—a young man shot through the groin—the shrapnel goes in small, comes out enormous; a huge hole in the left side of the thigh—' Ah, this scrotum wound's not so serious after all! He's lucky! Here's one of the lucky ones!'

"As we passed the river they were bringing in a corpse. A horrible swollen parcel. This strip of water is a godsend, as the wounded men can be transported by sampan back to a base hospital, without the agonising jolting over potholes that kills so many.

We drove in a jeep over rough roads which were being sprinkled with water by native women wearing dark, gloomy coloured draperies. This spraying, from gourd-like vases, seems futile, for it succeeds in laying the dust for only a few hours; but I am told that it helps to keep the roads from rapid and total deterioration. The rates of pay for this job are small, yet the women are like princesses doing their humble job with dignity and heartrending poise. Some of their features are wonderful. Their children help too, and throw water from old cigarette tins, jam jars or other little receptacles. While motoring over these craters we talked, most of the time, about subjects completely unrelated to the war, or our surroundings. The sun began to fade; the country became flatter. Everything became more sympathetic and feathery; the distance soft blue, the trees like spinach, and the humps of the hillocks dotted with lettuce-green undergrowth. The evening at once grew damp and cold, and we were thankful to arrive at a Transit Camp, where there were Bashas of bamboo, and—great luxury!—an orderly to attend to our every need.

"We opened a bottle of rum and were drinking in our tent when an eccentric old colonel appeared, and in a voice deep down in his throat, rasped: 'May I make my number with you?' My companion became truculent and asked in a surly voice: 'Why are you dressed as a colonel? You're not a colonel are you?'

"The old boy was rattled, and suggested he should go to another Basha. However he remained to amuse us and explained that he was an armament expert. He produced a large trunk full of weapons, like a property-box from a Ralph Lynn farce, also a black pei dog that he had bought for three chips. We eat an excellent dinner of well-cooked rations in a clean, light and congenial mess. Some of the smells here are wonderful—the charcoal fires, and the Indian savours of spice and cooking. After sleeping in fox-holes which are dark and dank most of the day, and at night become almost rank, this fastness of bamboo seemed extraordinarily luxurious.

"We had been warned that there would be a great deal of gunfire in a few moments—'It's us, not them.' Although I was told that the barrage was enough to split the eardrums, I was so tired after my day in the sun that I lay all night quite unconscious of the guns at close range, sleeping soundly and, thanks to the loan of the orderly's extra blanket, warmly."

"January 19th—In the Jungle.

"I awoke early. It was not yet light. There were heavy drops on the bamboo leaves above my head. I pictured the rains making it impossible for us to leave this mountain peak: the mud is so soon churned up, and the narrow paths in the jungle become obliterated—traffic is at a standstill. However I discovered that the drops were caused by the heavy dew which falls all through the year.

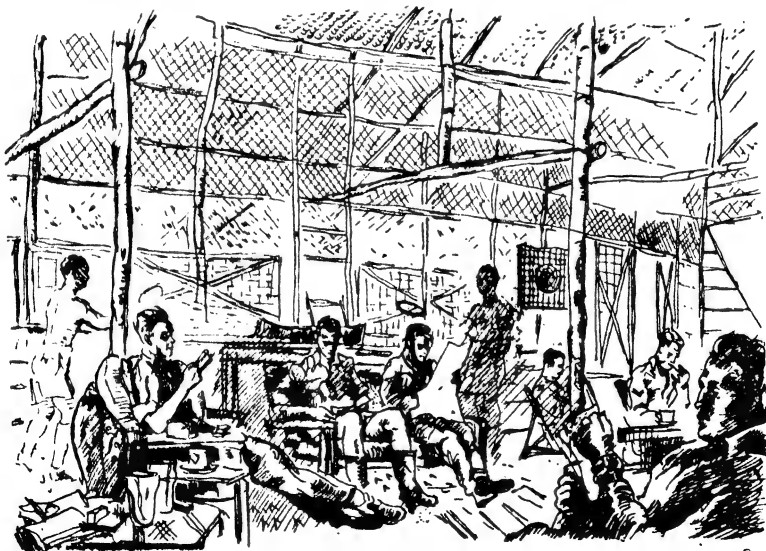
"Even this strange life in the jungle has many similarities with civilian existence. Major Abbott, my cicerone, was feeling a bit 'piano' on awakening. He sat on the edge of his bed delivering a soliloquy, while higher up the hill two young men were singing. 'Those half-witted fools, they wake up in the morning and talk such utter tripe to one another, they nearly drive me mad. I'm not liverish, but I'm too old to hear people sing at such an early hour.' Abbott, like many who hate to get up early, prolongs the agony by dawdling in bed long after he is called, and making the final decision to get out from the blankets when he is already late. Even so, he was quicker than I in dressing, for shaving is such a painful procedure and it takes me so long to nibble away with cold water. Abbott attacked his chin as if it were elephant hide. He scraped so hard, so boldly, that I thought his steel blade would split. The knife over the bristles made quite a loud noise. The dry shaving lather, under the lobes of the large hairy ears, escaped the perfunctory douche of cold water, and remained for the rest of the day.

"The Ngakyedauk Pass was closed while a convoy came over the mountain road, but we managed to extract a permit from the Military Police and took pictures of this extraordinary path that has recently been made through the hillside. Some of the going is still dangerous and, to warn people against falling over the precipices, some of the road is screened with strips of sacking, tied at intervals to dead trees. This makes a most curious and unreal effect with the elaborate panorama in the distance. That evening, in the setting sun, far beyond this honey-coloured foreground, lay a lovely landscape of grey hillocks and small hills with sharp formations stretching for many miles around—it was like an enormous panoramic background for a picture, possibly by Leonardo. Along this road, while the sun sinks behind the distant hills, the coolies hurry, bare-footed, carrying enormous tree trunks for bridging, or long flexible poles with hanging baskets. The waddling walk of these people, paralytic and jellified, looks affected."

"We crossed the river in a sampan to visit a mountain battery. When we arrived it was late afternoon: many of the men were freshly shaved, their hair brilliantined: they were now relaxing and writing home—but they complained that there was nothing to write about. One man was having his hair cut. Private Sullivan was reading a novelette, "Sunshine after Rain". Young Pierce of Birmingham, with a mop of fair hair, looking like Ariel, was cleaning out a mug from which most of the enamel had been chipped. Others were now rereading the troops' newspaper, already enjoyed and thumbed by so many that its pages were limp and pulpy. They offered you a cigarette and then, if they liked you, brought out their wallet and showed you, for admiration, their most treasured possession—the photographs of their wife and family. They would tell you that they miss their mother's cooking, an easy chair to sit in and flowers arranged in a vase. The cooks were preparing the evening meal. Fred Ridden was straining the water from the cabbage. Most of the men eat their meals without any relish; so long as they can have a brew of thick

char three times a day, they are satisfied. Many officers say they would rather have a cup of tea to stimulate them after a strenuous day's physical work than a tankard of beer. It seemed strange to find men and boys, from all over England, dumped on this extraordinary warren, climbing up and down the steep inclines, picnicking here for months on end, packing up and moving off to another hill."

"We drove in a jeep by the side of dried paddy fields from Bawli Bazaar to a place near Cox's Bazaar called Elephant's Point, situated on the long winding strip of sand stretching between the Indian Ocean and the jungle. Here at tremendous speed we raced across the hard sand in burning sun. It was a curious sensation. The sea was brilliant blue and silver. Here were health, sun, ozone—little wonder that I felt so well. Indeed I was now feeling so sturdy, contented and free from anxiety, that my whole appearance had changed. Even the vibrations I sent out were different. I felt years younger, and had learnt patience. We arrived at our destination—a holiday camp where service men, tired, rattled and in need of a rest, are posted for a week's relaxation. The place delighted us. A group of a dozen Bashes and huge recreation buildings, all made of this honey-coloured bamboo, created an effect as pretty as anything I have seen in Florida, California, Mexico or the South of France. These buildings were erected in five weeks. Some of the B.O.R.S. on arriving here felt at first that everything was too grand for them; but they soon came to enjoy the taste with which the whole camp is run. After spending



Jungle Recuperation Hostel

a few days of relaxation here, bathing, playing games on the sand, sleeping at night without having to listen for possible dangers, the men seem completely changed; eyes lose their look of strain; faces are sunburnt and lines are ironed out; and by the time their holiday is over they are anxious to be back with their regiment."

I left the fighting areas with many impressions jangling through my head. Much of the time had been spent in being uncomfortable and doing things that do not normally interest me; but I had been without anxieties. I had discovered that, degrading as this remote and primitive existence can be, there are compensations, and that even warfare may bring a feeling of physical serenity and peace of mind. After two weeks, my clothes were incredibly filthy; my face had entirely changed, both in colour and in expression. Even my hair was thicker, though only with dust. . . . Now I was heading for civilisation; the rut would be deep once more. In the jeep we raced towards my airplane and captivity. This visit to the war had been in many ways an escape from war. But at this time of the year the climate is ideal, and the weather suited for the picnic life that must be endured for weeks, months and years on end. I was able to sympathise with the R.A.F. officer who, on hearing that he was to be sent home, confided: "I'm beginning to be really frightened now. It may be such an anticlimax to go back to England, after all these years of thinking about the place and building it up in my imagination. I have glorified it all this time, and now that I'm really going back I'm afraid."

CHAPTER V

CHARIVARIA

I RETURNED to enjoy, with an added appreciation, the amenities and luxuries that are offered to the privileged in India. I will not try to describe my headaches, how I sweated in the summer heat until my clothes formed a sort of outer skin. I will not expatiate on the pleasures of taking a long bath, or hearing the clink of ice in a long drink, but will confine myself to a few "vignettes" collected during my tours of the next few weeks.

The scene is any Government House in India. In the throne-room, an assortment of respectable English and Indian citizens are assembled. The inevitable Belgian Consul and his wife stand next to the huge retired Colonel with high blood-pressure, who must avoid the brandy. One of the Indians wears a little shade across the width of his glasses, a most peculiar effect, as if he were wearing a Pullman-car reading-lamp. Some officers are in uniform; business tycoons, wearing baggy dinner-jackets of tropical weight, are accompanied by their scraggy wives. I feel sorry for the wives; they are married to men who are making great fortunes, but oh, they are paying for it dearly, looking thin and wizened, their complexions dried and wrinkled! In recompense they go to the races, they play bridge; and this dreary evening itself will provide material for future gossip. At the time they talk but little and take their pleasures seriously. Snobbery is their religion; their second Bible is the Warrant of Precedence. From the Governor-General and Viceroy of India (who is number one), each European of any standing has his number, his order of going in. Governors of Provinces are number two; the Commander-in-Chief, number four. If we descend the scale we find that Judges of the Federal Court have dropped to number thirteen, while Archbishops of the Roman Catholic Church rate fifteen (a). Small fry such as Baronets of England are marked down at twenty-three (a), Brigadiers at thirty-five, and a variety of officers such as Chief Electrical Engineers, Engineers-in-Chief of the Lighthouse Department, Superintendents of the Carriage and Wagon Department, at forty-seven. The Opium Agent Ghazipur warrants fifty. We have now sunk rather low in the scale, among the Electrical and Sanitary specialists, and, poor wretches, last of all, the Examiners of Questioned Documents.

There is no thought of arranging a formal dinner-table in any but the order of precedence. In small communities the same people find themselves, continuously and irrevocably, placed side by side, with nothing further to say to each other. It is not to be wondered at that the evening does not always go with a swing.

"Will you kindly form a line along there?" suggests a rosy A.D.C., with one arm and a cursory manner. "Two rows please—come along

now!" Some of the A.D.C.'s enjoy making the guests suffer. "They don't come to Government House for nothing," they say.

A long delay, long enough to make each guest fully realise what he is waiting for. At last a slight commotion is heard in the distance. "Their Excellencies", shouts the obstreperous young A.D.C.

Dinner is served on an enormous strip of table decked with bouganvillia. The inanimate faces of the heterogenous company are reflected in the row of silver cups, in which fronds of fern are placed in imitation of smylax.

Thirty servants, with scarlet turbans and bare feet, run around serving the inevitable banquet food. Each of the Governor's jokes is greeted with bursts of sycophantic laughter.

"Mercifully he seems in a good mood now," says A.D.C.2, sitting next to A.D.C.3 in starvation corner. "But I've seldom seen H.E. so rattled as he was this morning."

"Why?"

"On account of cotton and pins."

"Cotton and pins?"

"Yes, someone took away his graph of the Arakan Front, and I think I know who it was. But no one has owned up yet. How can these servants understand what all that mess is about? Anyhow, someone tidied it up."

"Her Excellency personifies graciousness itself, though she, too, had a bad morning. They put some flower garlands round her neck at the opening of the Agricultural Exhibition, and they dripped down a new dress she had had copied by the dzersi. She was so annoyed she didn't speak a word the whole way back in the car, and then, when she got back, she kicked up hell about the expenses of these dinners. Said we want quantity not quality, and we can't afford a shoulder."

The elegant Englishwoman next to me exclaims enthusiastically: "I know I must be mad as I've been seven years in India!"

On my other side, an elderly Indian gentleman tells me in a lifeless uninflected sing-song voice how he and his family are unable to obtain first quality rice. They have always been accustomed to it, but now they feel "uncomfortable" eating such poor stuff. It gives them indigestion; yet he, being a minister, cannot buy on the Black Market. He has always been a man of high principles, and in his position he cannot cheat.

The elegant lady turns to me again.

"Now do tell me how's dear old London? Very much changed? How are all the old places?"

"What sort of places?"

"Well now that leather shop in Grafton Street. Is that still going?"

"I'm afraid I'm rather vague."

The elegant lady alters her rôle. She now plays for sympathy:

"I've been away from England so long, I hardly know anybody there now. But when I go back I suppose everyone will say, 'Oh you were in India all the war?' and I'll have to answer, 'Yes'. You hardly know there is a war on here," she sighed. "You get irritated at not being able to buy a bottle of whiskey, and then you have to realise what other people are putting up with!"

From across the table a local business-man buttonholes me.

"I know your name. We all attain a degree of notoriety, don't we?"

Lady Blank, a living skeleton in wasp colours, has not addressed a word to her neighbour: she has eaten each course with a grudging determination. No sooner has the company risen and drunk the Governor's toast to the King Emperor, than Lady Blank shoots through the double doors, quick on the heels of Her Excellency. Lady Blank, after fifteen years of service in India, is not going to stand for that common little Lady Anon being placed above her. Her husband will be made to write to the Military Secretary for an explanation just as soon as they get home.

The company now retires to the illuminated garden and sits out in arm-chairs and on sofas, placed on Turkish carpets. It is a magical night; fronds of palm trees are silhouetted against the starlit sky. There is a crescent moon, and the Police Band plays "Merrie Englands" and "Poet and Peasant". The bandmen are in yellow and blue, with white spats.

At ten o'clock more of the European Colony are let in to the sacred precincts. A further display of Anglo-Indian fashions; some of the sailors of the R.I.N., in immaculate white uniforms, are almost throttled by their high collars—Beaux Idéals of all novelettes.

An intellectual lady, in a taffeta picture dress with a berthe of old lace, leans forward:

"Isn't it extraordinary that so great a country as India should have fallen so low? There is nothing of promise to be found anywhere here to-day. No writer, no painter. The only hope for the young Indian is to go into politics; and the only hope, if the country is to regain vitality and honesty, is revolution. If Congress were to take over, they'd make the inevitable mess of it; the dishonesty and craft of the Congress leaders would soon be discovered—bloodshed and anarchy would follow—but out of that, some fresh life might spring."

An elderly industrialist leans forward and says: "India is a feminine country, all her faults are feminine ones," and he raises his glass gallantly.

A beautiful Indian in a pink sari says: "Whatever those faults may be, let us make them. Please allow us our own headaches. India for the Indians, please."

The A.D.C.'s move everyone around, as if in a game of musical chairs.

Under a vast electric fan, like the propeller of an airplane, a lady in cornflower-blue lace welcomes a newcomer. "We were just saying that the problems of India only begin to get really confusing for someone after their first year here: then so many conflicting impressions arise, upsetting your balance, that you don't know where you are."

A young subaltern says: "I always say it takes a year to learn to hate India."

Two A.D.C.'s are standing apart, eyeing the guests. One holds a small printed card up to his mouth.

"H.E.'s already had the Sanitary Specialist's wife three minutes. It's time we got the Expert on Humus Heaps ready for him."

"Oh no, Mrs. Bumface gets seven minutes, she's on Post-War Reconstruction, but look, Her Ex. is getting a bit browned off with the Brigadier, hurry up and take that old chap over, he's the Commissioner of Police, what's his name?"

Sitting by a huge pot of cannas, a lady with blonde hair is telling an impressed group about her war work. She had organised the first ball here. It was called "The Glamorous Night"; it was wonderful getting so much money out of people. With a flick of a cyclamen chiffon handkerchief she explains :

"I can't tie bandages or nurse, but I'm super at organising dances: I'd like to become a professional hostess after the war, in London, and make bags of money."

At "The Glamorous Night" there had been "bags of people", but she got so ill organising these balls that her doctor had said: "You must stop your war work, it's no use your losing an arm or a leg. You're very good at this, but you must take things quietly."

"But," she gave us a confidential wink, "he never knew that all the time I had a telephone under my bed and was calling up hundreds of people!"

The obstreperous A.D.C. has been relentless in chivying the guests from one seat to another. He has been determined that the party shall end as soon as possible, as he has a clandestine appointment down in the Grand Hotel Bar, which shuts at eleven o'clock.

Her Excellency is rather enjoying her talk with Lady Anon when the A.D.C. interrupts.

"I think, your Excellency, that His Excellency is preparing to say good night."

The guests are hurriedly thrown into line again. Their Excellencies smile with relief. It is the smile the dentist receives when his patient is freed.

"Good night!—good night!—good night!"

The cars are churning up the gravel, especially imported from England. But in the first limousine, leaving a wake of dust and small stones, is the rubicund A.D.C., mopping his brow and telling the chauffeur to drive "Jaldi! Jaldi!"

A young Chindit, whom I had met when I first arrived in Delhi, was now about to go to hospital suffering, after four months in the jungle, from jaundice, amœbic dysentery, malaria, and every other sort of tropical disease. He had had a beastly time. My friend said he was saddened that his men must continue fighting under such appalling conditions, and he himself felt that they were incapable of conquering Burma in this way. Some of the men were beginning to ask, "Who wants Burma anyway?"

He, like so many others, had only one desire, and that was to fight the war in Europe. He considers the Germans are the natural enemy; he said he did not think it "worth while to be killed by a Jap, but a German is fair cop! Each soldier fights for glory: there is no glory in Burma. The British troops will put up with anything, their powers of endurance are remarkable, but some of the men have been out here five years, and an old campaigner is a grumbler; there are many grumblers".

The casualties among his men had been nearly seventy-five per cent. His men had done a good job and had mown down relays of Japs who had attacked them with almost inhuman relentlessness. They counted

thirteen hundred corpses around their barbed wire defences. When they had taken Magaung, only a week ago, he had come upon a hospital, abandoned by the Japs, who had left behind them thirty patients without food. As the English arrived, some of the patients fired from their beds; one threw a grenade, and others crouched around a grenade so that their stomachs were shot away. Finally, out of thirty men, only five were taken prisoner; the others had to be shot.

When later I visited the young Chindit in the Military Hospital he looked most pathetic as he lay, wearing green pyjamas, his face and body terribly shrunken by disease. His hands, coming out from flat paper-like sleeves, looked huge and predatory. He told me he had been having vivid dreams the last nights, re-living his experiences in the jungle.

"I'm not unnerved," he said. "Just depressed and tired. In so many ways it's been such a waste of time, and such a waste of the lives of so many friends."

I felt sad to leave him, for I felt doubtful if he would recover. A few weeks later he was dead.

The station was a vast dormitory. Many of the human bundles continued to sleep when the train came in with a deafening shriek. The carriages were so full that some of their would-be occupants hung, like tassels, from the doors and windows: yet everyone seemed to be enjoying the occasion, singing, laughing and spitting almost ceaselessly. The Indian is continuously washing out his mouth and washing his feet; and, in many ways, he is more careful of his cleanliness than our own troops. But he thinks nothing of infection or of spreading germs by spitting. Cases of smallpox will be aired abroad, and corpses often left in a train. "Grandmother has died en route—just too bad." The remainder of the family go their way leaving Grandma behind to her own resources.

Kaleidoscopic views move slowly past the windows; in the late afternoon light everything looks its best. The vast plateau is piled with boulders, one on top of another, which are said to be the relics of a sunken ocean; labourers are going home in the apricot light of the setting sun.

In my compartment sat a scientist in cotton-research, with the thinnest torso I have ever seen. He spoke English with grammatical perfection, and explained that, but for the war, he would now be at Cambridge. I offered him part of my supper; he tactfully accepted a revolting ham sandwich. My provisions were very English and, though prettily wrapped in a banana leaf, showed little imagination. Later my companion's bearer came in with a luncheon basket full of the most delicious, highly spiced foods, exquisitely cooked. He offered me something that had a taste of fish but which was vegetable, something that looked like a fish and tasted of fruit. At each halt, no matter how remote the spot, the train was besieged by an army of beggars, sellers of food, fruit, tepid lemonade and coconut-milk.

My companion announced: "No doubt you've learnt that India is a small country, that there is one set that knows everything about 'everyone who is anyone'. If you visit one city they know all about it in another. I know you were ill in Calcutta and stayed three weeks in Delhi."

I wondered if perhaps he had been poring over a copy of *The Onlooker*, which shows pages of "Society snapshots", and describes how "charming in voile" Mrs. B—— looked at the Bombay races on Saturday. Gossip is garnered from the leading towns under such inspired and inspiring headings as: "Madras Musings—Poona Prattle—Nagpur Nonsense—In Lucknow Now—Calcutta Causerie—Peshawar Palaver—Bangalore Lore".

"Zita", in the fifth year of war, writes an article on "The Art of Wearing Jewellery". Here are a few gems of advice:—

"The peeress wears hers with perfect poise. Don't proceed to don mechanically all the diamond and ruby jewels that you possess, instead choose one outstanding piece from among them, or better still, a couple of emerald ornaments; this will provide colour contrast and suggest individuality."

and again,

"So many women take their jewels as a matter of course. It is taken for granted that the best diamonds must shine at the biggest parties, and there the matter ends. Now don't go to the other extreme and avoid jewellery altogether. A woman has to be particularly lovely or particularly chic to do without jewellery for evening wear."

A friend of mine went one better than "Zita". She wrote: "Don't bring any jewels with you out here, the elephants have much better."

* * * * *

Hyderabad: The birds fly into this house as if it were an aviary; at night the insects create a fog around the electric light, bats rush in and out unremarked. Two small birds managed to make a great amount of mess upon my shaving tackle and over the wash-basin. One is accustomed to ants hurrying over everything, but I was startled to find two frogs in the bath.

From the heights of the Chars Minars, in the centre of the town, one sees best the broadened thoroughfares and the many pretty houses with elaborate windows carved like shells, and lacework verandahs. No one particular street is devoted to brass or spices. Unlike most Indian cities the streets are extraordinarily clean and sweet smelling, and the various kinds of shops are dispersed, so that one finds a Gun and Ammunition store (yes, anyone is allowed to carry arms) next to a nut shop, which is, in turn, neighbour to a flower shop (no flower remains long on its stalk, but is soon beheaded to become part of a garland). Only in the Moti Market, with its extraordinary, white, pear-shaped columns, are all the birds brought together in tall, pointed, cane cages.

The coffins of former Nizams are covered with scarlet cloth, which has faded to become a sad and beautiful pink, and strewn with half dead jasmine blossoms.

The temples at Ajanta, of which the remaining caves, halls and monasteries are India's proudest artistic possession, date from nearly three hundred B.C. to about six hundred A.D., when Buddhism was expelled

from India. Although they have been covered with silt from about seven hundred A.D. until their comparatively recent discovery, much of their rich carving remains, and the pigment of the wall painting with which they were decorated is still astonishingly vivid. But not only their extreme antiquity makes these paintings remarkable. The stylisation of the human figures is interesting; the decoration of ceilings, flowered and be-birded, is delightful, in the manner of sixteenth-century Italian villa decorations; and it is fascinating to study the detail. We can see so much of the life of the times; the shops, the processions, the reception of a Persian Embassy by a Rajah, a snake-charming scene, and a hunt, with antelope and hounds. We can enjoy the precision of the paintings of jewellery, and of ants climbing a tree. But æsthetically I feel these paintings, which we have come to know so intimately from reproduction, have been over-praised. The drawing is often weak, the faces too pretty, the fingers too pointed.

To me, the temples carved out of the rock at Ellora are infinitely more extraordinary. A stupendous tribute to religious emotions, they were created by medieval priests, who were at work over a period of six hundred years; they are perhaps the world's greatest work of devotion. The shrines are shaped out of the rock and carved downwards in imitation of wooden buildings; the exactitude of the proportions of the columns, and the expressive vitality of the stylised figures, all carried out on a gargantuan scale, are one of the most eloquent relics of India's greatness in the tenth century. There are twelve Buddhist caves, fifteen Brahman and five Jain temples. The rows of Buddhas forming colonnades, Buddha in every pose, preaching and in meditation; the figures of Siva dancing, sleeping, in the lotus position; the carved angels; the flying nymphs, so strong and expressive in movement—are not only the finest remains of antiquity in India, but are among the world's greatest works of art.

The Kaibasa, the abode of Siva, is carved entirely out of the living rock, with a courtyard, two gigantic stone elephants, a screen, a shrine two storeys high, and beyond a temple containing a hall over fifty feet square, borne by sixteen wonderful columns on a base carved with a procession of elephants.

In the strong Indian sunlight, the highlights on this rich carving are as dazzling as silver.

We drove into the mountains. A shoot had been arranged—my first shoot. I had never realised before how simple, to the point of foolishness, these expeditions can be. I had imagined a certain amount of risk was involved; but not on this occasion at any rate.

It appears that the preparations for this outing had started here last night, when a goat was supplied for the consumption of a female leopard, who had been shot at her dinner. The male leopard had later so enjoyed the partly eaten meal that, doubtless, he would come back to-night at eight o'clock sharp. Another wretched goat, provided as bait, was lead out and staked. The sportsmen retired behind the foliage-covered windows of a small concrete building, strategically placed ten yards away. Here we took up our positions to watch the misery of the goat.

Left to its own resources it became apprehensive. It felt lonely on the end of a chain, with the mountain landscape fading into darkness around it. Plaintive bleats rang through the canyons. It walked around its stake in circles. It became panicky one minute, its head darting this way and that. Then it seemed merely miserable, its front legs collapsed, and it lay still whimpering. But, in abject terror at some noise, it was up in a flash; again its head moved to and fro, listening. I shall never forget that blunt, rock-like profile, seen through the black leaves of my window. I wondered why I was allowing myself to be party to something I considered so unfair and ignominious. It was awful to see an animal suffering the mental torments that, mercifully, one has left behind one in the night-nursery. Yet I must admit that I had worked up a certain blood-lust. It was exciting to watch and wait in the silence for the great moment when the lurking leopard would spring out of the blackness of night, and the loaded gun go off. Though we realised there was little chance of the leopard escaping (a miracle if the goat were not killed), our eyes were popping out of our heads with excitement. Nor was there a chance of the leopard getting at us in our concrete hiding place.

So we waited. But we were out of luck, or perhaps the goat was in luck. After one and a half hours no leopard came, and the Colonel who was organising the shoot suggested that it was useless to wait longer. The anticlimax was crushing, the fatigue terrific. Even the goat had become too tired to bleat; it delivered itself of pathetic little grating croaks, like whimpers of despair, and lay down to sleep. Its joy when we came out of our hiding-place to unleash it from the stake was worth any disappointment that murder had not been committed. The goat had, at any rate, one more night to live.

Married couples fight among themselves; the climate makes them crochety. The husband says, "We will go this way."

"No dearest, this way," replies his wife.

"Please don't contradict me, I was trying to tell Beaton that the Buddhist art from India hurtled out to Java and China, and ricocheted back here much more Chinese than Indian; that is why you see so much Chinese stuff in India. But of course, if you will interrupt me. . . ."

The nagging continues, often at the expense of the servants. After dragging my weary bones around various courtyards, the stables, the swimming pool, the rock garden and tennis courts, I would long to sink into a chair; but I am taken to see the pets' cemetery and, as always happens when I arrive in a new place, I am pumped to the gills with information that I cannot possibly imbibe. I try to concentrate, then my mind wanders. It is extremely good of people to give me of their precious time; but invariably an argument springs up completely above my head.

"No, not in the fifteenth century, in the thirteenth."

"Not Deccan, Swatt."

"Now you must go to Benares."

"Stuff and nonsense, Benares is a complete waste of his time; a nasty, dirty place full of smells."

The mother hands me a silver frame. "This is a photograph of my son. He's just been asked to contribute to a magazine, I can't remember its name."

The father volunteers the information: "It's a provincial magazine of some sort."

The mother smarts. "London!" she contradicts, and doing so, she kills her mate with a look. The father comes to life again and retorts: "Provincial".

With fury in her heart the mother reiterates, "Excuse me it's a London magazine—I have got the letter—my son wrote the letter to me, and it's a London magazine."

"Provincial," says the father sullenly.

Suddenly the wife calls "Boy!" A very old man runs in with a turban on his head.

My hostess has lived in India for many years, but she does not speak the language.

"Turn on the fans."

The old boy goes out and turns off the electric light. We are left in total darkness. A major operation is launched before it is possible to get the "boy" back to turn on the lights again, and then to get the fans going.

* * * * *

My diaphragm became constricted. I felt feverish. By the end of the morning I realised I was in for some sort of 'flu fever. After lunch I had to take to my bed. I sweated, swallowed aspirins, sweated more, and the doctor came. He was amused at my taking six aspirins, and showed rows of teeth. He would come again. I didn't feel very ill, but more comfortable in bed than up; but I had a high temperature. Later I sank lower into the bed; my body ached a good deal. I wanted to have the pain broken up by massage, but this was not possible. By degrees I accepted the fact that I had no fight left. I rather enjoyed being a victim of some tropical disease. I quite willingly relapsed into a complete state of invalidism. I felt as if every bone in my body were broken. For days my body ached in the most unexpected places—on the shoulders, in the small of the back, behind the knees.

I recovered. Then I became much worse. One night particularly I thought would never end. Soon the fever worked itself into a crescendo of pain, sweating and general misery. The doctor told me that this was the normal course of Dengue Fever, which I must have caught from a mosquito that lives by the sea. After the very bad night I would recover, the doctor said. I did.

We motored along the roads fringed by Casuarina trees. Women, wearing draperies that gave them the appearance of fluid Greek statues were working among the sugar canes, the wheat and brilliant green grass like clover on which the cattle live, which yields a harvest almost all the year round. One of the women wore a faded scarlet rag thrown over the

head and body—a most unpractical costume for her job of threshing or gathering wood, but more beautiful than any other. In these parts red seems to be the fashionable colour, ranging from burgundy to squashed strawberry. The natives, in their bullock carts, wore crimson turbans of enormous size. The bullocks, placid and beautiful, wore appealing and pathetic expressions on their faces, and some had white dewlaps, like fish fins. Their horns flew out in huge, baroque volutes.

The village of Purana Ghat, of colonnaded, pale yellow buildings, of columns and pagodas of thrush egg blue, of massive archways under which the bullocks, harnessed to their heavily loaded carts, shelter from the rains, leads to the town of Jaipur. Of all the cities of India I have seen, this is the nearest to the dazzling pictures of one's childhood imagination.

Laid out in the eighteenth century, the wide streets run parallel. With its open squares and pleasure gardens, the city is so well planned and spacious, and its colours so harmonious that the general effect is of an almost dream-like leisure and serenity. Thanks to the rule that all houses must be painted a uniform coral colour and façades embellished with birds, fish and flowers painted in white, the effect is that of a Moghul miniature brought to life. The populace sport particularly bright coats or turbans; and when they bring out to dry in the sun billowing, freshly-dyed lengths of vivid yellow or magenta muslin, one feels that nowhere else in the world have robust colours been used to produce such refined and subtle combinations.

Small carriages with hoods of the eighteenth century, shaped like pagodas or like sedan chairs on wheels, disgorge Rajputana ladies and their children, with heavily painted eyes, all wearing a mass of jewels, and crimson and dark cherry-coloured draperies. The dark faces of young men wearing peppermint pink turbans are seen peeping inquisitively from the balconies of carved white marble that are inset with coloured glass in floral designs.

In the inner court of the Zenana Palace, women in daffodil yellow, apricot and orange draperies polish the white marble columns. A young man, wearing a pea-green turban and a lilac coat, spends his morning lolling against an archway and looking like a figure painted on enamel five hundred years ago.

The legacy of this wonderful city has fallen into safe hands. The Maharajah of Jaipur is a young man with a proud appreciation of the beauties of his state, and a keen interest in building anew. The Rambagh Palace, with its ivory lacework, is as near to the ideal Indian Prince's Palace as any modern structure can be. Elaborate building schemes have been held up during wartime, but the Maharajah intends that his state shall become one of the show-places of the world. When this war is over, and travellers are able once more to take to the air for pleasure, Jaipur will become a great centre. Visitors will be well looked after in State hostels. They will not have far to go for sightseeing, for every vista provides a surprise. Their chief goal will be the Palace of Amber, perched

in the hills that cup this lovely town. Apparently carved of the rock from which it soars, this castle is of such delicate proportions that it seems to have been built on stilts: Avignon comes to mind. The formal water-gardens and parterres are French in character; but the corridors with thick walls, cool vaulted rooms with windows placed to catch the evening zephyrs, and the terraces for moonlit supper-parties, all show the hand of the Indian architect. The interior decoration of the Palace is of a marvellous intricacy and richness. Some of the rooms are ornamented with mirror and plaster filigree, and when the windows are shut and the candles lit, they seem to have been invaded by a million fire-flies.

The Maharajah is particularly fortunate in his Prime Minister, Sir Mirza Ismail, a man of Persian extraction who combines energy and business-sense with a poetic love of beauty. He is the arch-enemy of corrugated iron, brass bands and almost everything else that is crude and vulgar; one can be sure that, under his guidance, there will be no mistakes in taste, and that Jaipur will retain its original charm without ever degenerating into a mere museum-piece. Besides supervising the architecture of the city, Sir Mirza Ismail also acts as Sanitary Officer. Jaipur to-day is so well organised that it has an air of almost Dutch cleanliness.

It is a thrilling experience to motor through the streets with the Prime Minister, accompanied by his secretary.

"That water over there overflows from the hills—see to it that there are more drainways." "Get rid of that black border." "All those houses must come down." "These streets must be enlarged by five feet, make a note of it." His car moves forward and he points through the window, gives his instructions and, under his administrative authority, the miracles are set in motion. Already he has achieved in a short time remarkable metamorphoses. His plans are as numerous as his inspirations.

Over the mountains and down through the gorge, Sir Mirza has restored to beauty the temples of Gulpha, where a spring (supposedly a reappearance of the Ganges), rises, to which pilgrims come in their thousands for libations. The temples have gained a new life, their façades painted afresh with colours as appetising as those of angelica or preserved cherries. Hundreds of monkeys, clustering together on the ledges of the temples, watch the turbaned artists renovating the frescoes. A man with a strong face and long thin legs, wearing only a dark brown drapery falling from a white ring around his head, jumps across the rocks, with a flat basket, to feed the monkeys. He knows each of them well: he is determined which is to receive his allotted portion. Sometimes, just as one animal behind him is about to leap for a forbidden crust of brown bread, he lets out unexpectedly with a backward movement of a leg.

Inside the temple, the musicians, with painted forehead markings, wearing poisonous colours, sit by the hour making strange sounds on peculiar shaped instruments. The temple assistants, dressed from head to foot in blood scarlet, hurry past with plates of steaming food, curries and soups, hang garlands of marigolds and roses round the shoulders of visitors, or sit vaguely watching the acrobatic contortions of some of the worshippers paying obeisance to the glittering Goddess.

The cook had prepared for us a concoction of milk of almonds, rose-water, carminum nuts and eight ingredients of which Hashish, or Bhang, was the principal.

One of the effects of Bhang is that it makes everything appear humorous. Another is that strange things happen to one's sense of time.

The drink was delicious. We sat on cushions on the floor, expectantly. We waited for results, and were disappointed. So we had dinner. Still no effect, and our laughter was slightly self-conscious. This was thoroughly disappointing. We had finished the brew, and there was no possibility of getting any more.

My friend started to giggle a little, but I was not amused. If other people's amusement is disproportionate one feels suddenly sobered. A little later I noticed that my hands felt soft and boneless, the skin unusually silken; I could not quite feel the extremities of my body. But the evening was a disappointment—too bad!

We sat in the drawing-room prepared to spend the rest of the evening in conversation. We had not been sitting there for more than a moment when the drug worked with such tremendous force that, for the rest of the evening, we were dazed. The experience was not altogether pleasant: for, although this is a laughing drug, and I laughed inordinately, the sensations were so far beyond my control that I was rather anxious and apprehensive as to how the evening would end. My friend, as he sat regarding me with pink blotched face and pearly grin, seemed to look quite different from any former picture I had had of his appearance. Outside, a strange metallic clicking sound was heard. It struck me as humorous that it should continue so long, and, imagining it to come from a bird, I remarked upon the bird's insistence. I realised in a flash that I was mistaken; but my friend's surprise, and his incredulity as he repeated "a bird?", seemed to me so terribly funny that I laughed until I was unconscious. In my chest I had a feeling of strange constriction; I continued laughing when I re-emerged into semi-consciousness, and my companion laughed at my amusement. I tried feebly to tell him that he looked different, that he reminded me of a school friend named Dudley Scholte, but I was tongue-tied.

For the next two and a half hours we were violently drugged. The hallucination seemed to last an eternity. A reaction that would normally take only a fraction of a second seemed now to continue for ever. One wondered if the other person could read these long deliberations that were going on in one's mind. I noticed that my friend was far from reality, and sat smiling in utmost intoxication. The proportions of the room had changed. The distance across the floor suddenly seemed as large as the Atlantic; one's eyes could hardly travel to the far end of the music-room. The arches under which my friend sat assumed cathedral proportions, though, in fact, they were only a little over six feet high.

So submerged in intoxication were we, that I wondered what would happen if some visitors from the outside world were to arrive. We were incapable of speaking consecutively; the effort was too great, so that one gave up with a confidential look. Neither did one know if one had voiced a remark, or whether the thought had been so vivid that one merely imagined it to have been spoken. Somehow, one felt that speech would

break the spell, and one did not wish to break it. But the spell continued and, occasionally, a reply would prove that one's attempts to hang on to sanity were not in vain. But my friend's brain was acting better than mine. I was able to understand him to say that this drug gave a far greater degree of intoxication than any drink. I could not have managed such a sentence. He continued, "Already we would have passed out or been sick, with an appalling hangover."

I heaved with laughter, and with tears coursing down my cheeks muttered, "We are beyond speech," and again was convulsed.

But although I was "in extremis", I was anxious not to forget this experience, and kept asking, "How much of this will we remember?"

My friend had a particularly beautiful and elaborate gramophone, with loud-speaker relayed from the ceiling: we decided to listen to some music. I have never appreciated or understood music so clearly as I did then: each instrument in a large orchestra was heard individually, with extraordinary distinctness. I was able to follow the construction of a piece as never before. An Indian song was played—some Spanish music—a Russian march—and then some very hackneyed Debussy. I could not concentrate for the entire length of each piece, but when I surfaced to enjoy a few bars, their beauty was astonishing.

I remember that we went out of the room to look at the servants playing high jinks by the garden door. To move across the room was a great feat. We watched two houseboys putting up the mosquito nets over a bed, and they too giggled hysterically. Most of the household had taken a few sips of the potion, and there were giggles at the back of every door.

Later I paced the room attitudinising, experimenting and trying to find out how far one could see, how much it was possible to regain consciousness by exercising the mind. My friend watched me in a trance. Not only was perspective altered, but the stereoscopic values were those of a badly equipped peepshow in a museum. My friend's body was flat, as if pasted on cardboard. There was a great distance between him and the table, and another vast jump from the table to the curtain. One's time-sense had broken down with extraordinary results—ten minutes would pass in a moment: a split-second would seem like many hours. The journey to my bed seemed to take an æon.

Next morning I awoke with no headache, but feeling placid and unconscious of my body—this was an advantage later when sight-seeing. For days I was slightly under the influence of the drug, and laughed easily. I was interested and pleased to find how much of the experience I could remember, and how my appreciation of the music had been a real and lasting gain.

Benares, the sacred city of the Hindu World, was looking its most squalid in the mire that had accumulated after a week's rainfall. Along the edges of the Ganges, that holy but muddy river, people were washing themselves in the picturesque but unhygienic manner of which Miss Mayo

has given us so hilarious a description. Yes, there were the corpses wrapped in cotton, in the centre of a pyre producing blue smoke. Yes, there were the scrofulous pei dogs, there the sacred cows nosing about among the mess, there the oozing walls, the indecent carvings and the temples redolent of butchers' shops, with their shiny tiles and smell of meat. There were the old marigold petals strewn among the muck.

This is India without neon lights, cinemas, cabarets or American standards of plumbing. This is Hindu India, almost unchanged, in spite of its sacking by the Mussulmans and the passage of centuries.

I stayed as the guest of a young Swiss, who came here for a short holiday seven years ago, and has remained ever since. He lives as an Indian, has adopted the Hindu religion, and in wartime manages, remote from the chaos of Europe, to continue his studies of Indian music and philosophy.

In this household there is no hurry, no dressing-bells, and meals are served whenever anyone feels hungry. I felt that life here had much of the truthfulness which is essential to the happiness of any artist.

My bedroom consisted of a bed on the terrace of the Zenana's wing, which I shared with a delightful creature, the Sacred Cow. Strangely enough the women's quarters, painted terra-cotta red, were uncompromisingly dour and masculine in effect.

I washed in a series of brass bowls. There were no easy chairs. We sat on the floor, leaving our shoes on the threshold. A man came to sell paintings, some of the eighteenth-century, some obscene. We eat delicious foods with scented flavours and aromatic spices, sweets of orange jelly and rose-leaf—as much a perfume as a sweet.

What would we do? Have some music? The musicians arrived. I appreciate many of the rhythms and the intricacies of some of the variations, but I cannot follow the course of a piece of Indian music; nor, having chosen a special scale, as any appreciative listener does, do I know what notes must eventually be struck. But the sounds that issue from some of these fruit-shaped instruments are soothing and soporific.

My host tried to give some account of the advantages of the Hindu religion. The interpretation by the old gurus of the Holy Book was thrilling. Was it not foolish to challenge their superior knowledge? Why be incredulous if some unintelligent person were to state: "This electric iron is cold, but if you plug this wire into the wall it will become hot!" "So," said my friend, "why be sceptical if he says that from the worship of the cow one can receive an amazing impression of divinity." It cannot be denied that my host possessed a rare calm and serenity.

By now I had travelled many thousands of miles in India, and had seen, in a few months, more than many whose lives are spent pegged to some one spot on this gigantic peninsula. I had seen displays of surpassing wealth and acute poverty. I had discovered that in this country where eighteen million people make their livelihood from the land, and where the rapid increase of population creates troubles on an ever-mounting scale, one great storm can bring to millions famine or bounty. I had never agreed that India was a "first-rate country for second-rate people."

England has been wise in sending forth from her shores, as administrators, only the best of her race, for the Indian's perception of character amounts to an extra sense. Against India's historical background of tyrannies, corruption and cruelty, of internecine wars, famines and other decimating calamities, the efficient work of five generations of English service must command our respect. British engineers have developed huge barrage systems, bringing to fertility immense tracts of desert; canals and railways have been built across the country. The rise of Indian industrialism has been rapid. The Government Services, political, medical, police, judicial and educational, have been run with efficiency. The British have shown aptitude for careful administration, and have learnt that by one peremptory order they could not overthrow the tradition of thousands of years; that man's nature is subject to circumstances, differences of climate, food, soil, education and religion. The British have shown respect for the deeply religious feelings of the Indian. On this point let me quote the Abbé Dubois, a medical and ecclesiastical missionary, remarkably free from theological prejudices, who wrote at the end of the eighteenth century an extraordinary work on "Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies."

"Accordingly there is not one of their ancient usages, not one of their observances, which has not some religious principle or object attached to it. Everything, indeed, is governed by superstition and has religion for its motive. The style of greeting, the mode of dressing, the cut of clothes, the shape of ornaments, and their manner of adjustment, the various details of the toilet, the architecture of the houses, the corners where the hearth is placed and where the cooking pots must stand, the manner of going to bed, and of sleeping, the forms of civility and politeness that must be observed; all these are severely regulated. Nothing is left to chance. Everything is laid down by rule, the foundation of all their customs is, purely and simply, religion. It is for this reason that the Hindus hold all their customs and usages to be inviolable, for being essentially religious, they consider them as sacred as religion itself."

Yet in spite of almost unsurmountable difficulties, improvements have been made in many matters of hygiene. Widows and lepers are no longer buried alive. Yet, as the late Robert Byron wrote in his brilliant "Essay on India":

"The effort of the East, in civilisation, has been primarily metaphysical, that of the West social; Western man's betterment has been achieved through political experiment, in the East, concentration or discovery of good by thought and ecstasy."

Perhaps it is owing to its climate that the English have never colonised India. The majority of Englishmen who arrive to give their services to India think only of the day when, their task finished, they will return to their native land. Yet the Insurance Companies work on the calculation that these men will survive retirement in England only three years.

I have come across dreary examples of the intolerance and lack of imagination of a few British working in minor capacities, just as I have become exasperated with the weakness of character and idleness, apathy and desire to shelve responsibility of certain Indian officials. Much of

the criticism we have heard of existing conditions in India comes from people who, liking to see all nations of the world living according to exactly the same standards, mistrust, or even consider as uncivilised, everything which differs from their own creed.

In the great heat of the summer I had travelled by electric train to the mountains, and enjoyed the perfumes, so fresh and welcome, of the damp moss, ferns and palms. In the Indian Hill Stations, Scottish Hydros spawn among a vegetation which seems to belong more to a Victorian Britain than to the Himalayas. Virginia creepers circle around the iron-work verandahs, and one is back among the faded snapshot albums of croquet parties and groups on the porch steps.

I had formed many quick and easy friendships; I had come across some remarkable people; one of the most intelligent men I had met was a young Indian poet. I had begun to rely upon the thoughtfulness of my bearer, who tended me like a parent during my bouts of fever, and the note of whose character was struck by Robert Byron:

"That innate sense of propriety, decorum, acceptance of stations, which is a result of his profound conviction of human inequality. He has no desire for equality, knows no hatred for the rich and propertied, in fact is against his most deeply engrained instincts."

I had been impressed by the old doctor, the only man in India who can do the eye operation for cataract, who brings back the eyesight to two thousand Indians during the six weeks when he leaves the hospital where, for the remainder of the year, he carries out his experiments with American doctors training under him. It would take only one day's illness, and a short glimpse of their work, to realise that the over-life-size matrons in charge of large hospitals are the salt of the earth. In England there is one nurse for every two hundred people; here one among thirty thousand. These matrons are busy teaching Indian women to nurse, their operating theatres are filled with Indians, Indian anæsthetists, surgeons and nurses; yet continually they feel an undercurrent of resentment and discord from those in their charge, and find notes placed on their chair or desk with the message to "Quit India". The Provincial Governors allow poor funds for their work, and their own salaries are pitifully small. One of them told me that her great pleasure was to go and look at the Asia Crafts Shop, at the wooden bowls which were "so full of colour. They don't mind at all, if you don't buy, if you just look around, and occasionally I *do* buy something—but that's for a wedding present."

I had been impressed by the red carpets at Government House, and had received much enjoyment quietly watching behind the scenes the A.D.C.'s at their various jobs, and listening to the young subaltern, with one arm and a large moustache on the telephone, saying "Her Excellency says let it simmer till seven."

Many unforgettable pictures had been flashed on my mind. The Rajputana women, like goddesses, in red, carrying the red bricks on their heads with which the American barracks are being built at Delhi: the highly-coloured groups in their fluttering scarves drawing water at the

wells as they have done for the last two thousand years: the three priests hurrying, in pale apricot draperies, between the trams in Calcutta, in this paradoxical setting looking like Tanagra figures. On the rocks splashed by the waves of the Arabian Ocean, to the sounds of an old man beating silver discs, the Indian dancers postured, grimaced and went through the formal rituals of the incantation dances. A coolie, with a huge sheet loosely wound around his head, like Aladdin's genie, went before me with a lamp, revealing the various treasures from the dark past in the painted caves of Ajunta. In the factories and mills occasionally one would come across a young person occupied at some humble task, working out his or her god-appointed destiny with such remarkable dignity and grandeur that one felt near tears: and often the conjunction of youth and physical perfection created an effect that was more akin to magic than to human matter.

I had been awe-inspired by the Indian women, married in their teens, mothers of many children before reaching the age of twenty, working so hard amid grinding poverty, carrying heavy, gourdlike pots of water from the well, cooking, taking their husbands food to the fields, looking after the children and animals and even remaking, with cakes of cow-dung, the walls of their homes. All these tasks they do with a grace of movement that has the dignity of an empress.

I had discovered how detrimental to the brain the Indian climate can be. I had telephoned to Natarajan and said, "I want you to do three things for me." I enumerated the three things. Natarajan replied, "I must put those down now before I forget—one, yes—two, yes—now what was the third thing you wanted?" Neither he nor I were able to remember.

I had seen an electric light bulb burning palely in the sun; no one could be bothered to turn it out—yet there was a scarcity of electric bulbs. I remember thinking, "This is typical of India."

In spite of a wish to trespass into the elusive company of the inhabitants of this country, I felt I had seen little of the real India. I had not more than begun to experience a few of her many sorts of weather and geographical conditions, that range from the perpetual snows of the mountains to the stretches of scrub where the heat rises to one hundred and thirty degrees. Yet, now I must leave.

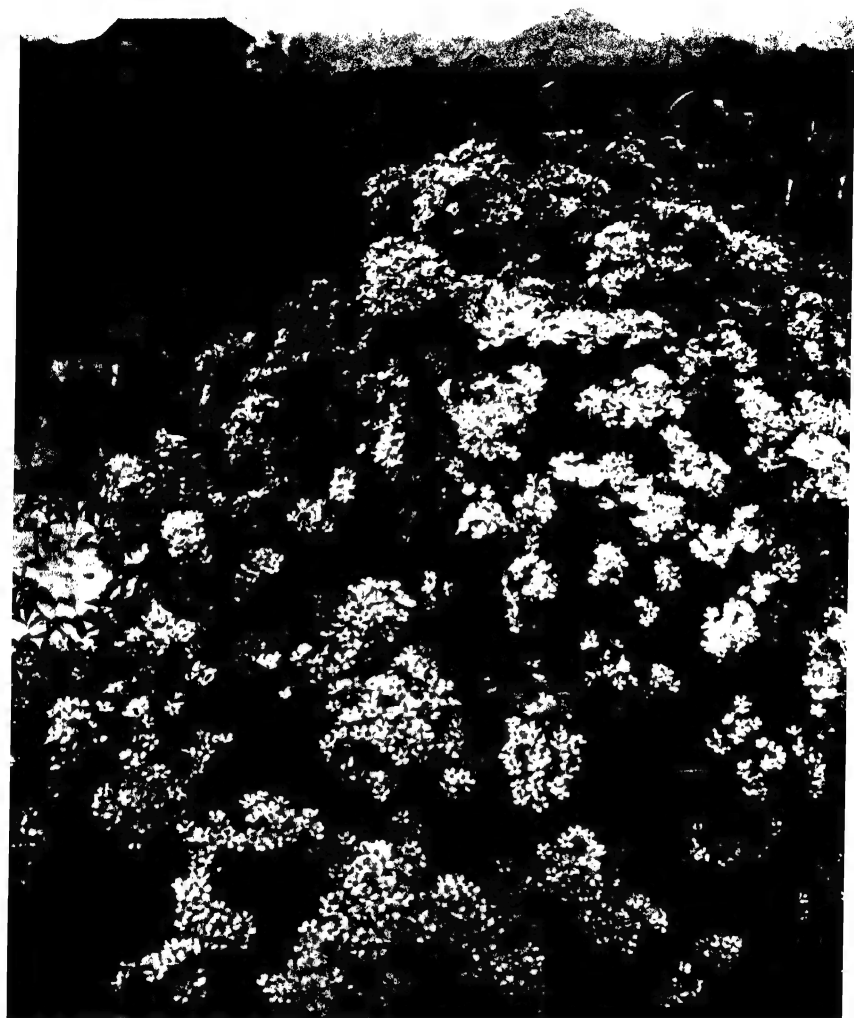
I ran into the house and did rough packing. Within three minutes I was ready for departure. I distributed largesse, as the expression is, to each servant. But the staff awaited the moment for me to step into the car, before running out with a large box marked SERVANTS BOX.

"SERVANTS BOX!"—"SERVANTS BOX!" they each took up the cry, and, before my eyes, pushed the rupee notes into the slot; each one laughing with childish amusement, "SERVANTS BOX!"—"SERVANTS BOX!"

As I drove away I was cheered by the household—the sweeper, the cook, the laundryman and the kitmagars, all shouting and laughing, "SERVANTS BOX!—SERVANTS BOX!—SERVANTS BOX!"



Indian Gunners



Riverside Blossom

CHAPTER VI

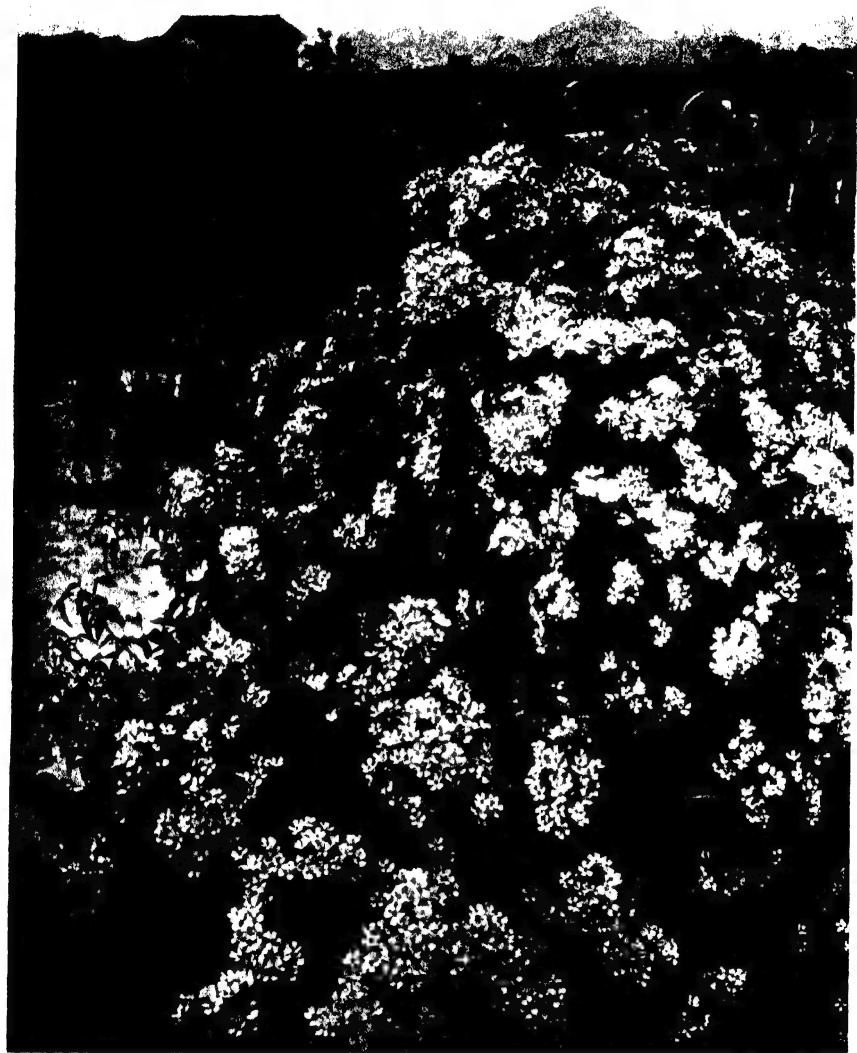
TO CHINA

ONE of the most prodigious of all war feats has been the establishment of an air-service from India over the Himalayan Mountains to China. This traffic continues in the face of appalling hazards, day and night, in all weathers, through the year. No journey could be more difficult and dangerous. If the pilot should get lost, it is impossible to map-read the course; the route is crowded and collisions have been frequent. Violent electrical storms toss aircraft about mercilessly, causing civilian passengers to utter panic-stricken screams as a draught throws them up two thousand feet, or worse still, drops the plane as if it were a stone, and there is not always that much space to spare. The pilots know that to clear some of these peaks they must fly at an altitude of between twenty and thirty thousand feet, and that the failure of one engine means disaster. "There's a mountain straight in front of me," a pilot was heard to say over the radio, "but I guess it's too late." Often the cargo is such that it cannot be jettisoned to lessen weight in case of emergency. There is no place en route for a safe forced landing. Often the trip is made flying blind almost the whole way. From the number of colleagues they have lost, the pilots know that the odds against them are high, but they keep up these trips over the "Hump", conveying all passengers, cases of medicine and currency, every bullet, grenade, spare-part, rubber tyre, jeep or six-wheel truck—everything, in fact, which is brought into the country. Thus China to-day is receiving more aid than ever came to her along the Burma Road.*

At the airport I sympathised with the Chinese civilians who sat awaiting the "take-off" in the heat of an Indian summer day, for they were wearing three suits apiece. Although the Indian officials are smilingly tolerant about the regulation that only one suit may be taken into China (where clothing fetches prohibitive prices), the Chinese could hardly have started peeling off their layers of Harris tweed.

We climbed very high in the air; the vast mountains, under a covering of icing-sugar, appeared on the port side to be very much higher than we were flying. Most of the passengers were extremely sick and made horrible noises into paper bags. After a bit, the American sergeant sitting next to me said he wished we'd bump more, as it was very exciting. I soon envied the Chinese civilians their extra suiting; one's clothes suddenly felt flimsy; it was getting very cold in the airplane. I tried to sleep—couldn't—tried to read—couldn't. I looked from the windows, grateful for the soothing colours of the cloudscape, but I did not like the rugged mountain peaks still soaring above us. I stopped looking. The sensation in my ears warned me we were flying higher. I felt dizzy and uncomfortable from the height of twenty thousand feet, and I wrote down some of my impressions with a wobbly hand:--

* April, 1944.



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* April, 1944.

"Eyes watering—head lolling from side to side—no energy, mental or physical—a tingling in hands—chest pains in spasms—snow mountains—snow clouds—sky prismatic rainbow colours—scratch ice from windows—20 degrees below zero—headache like neuralgia—as day advances light on mountains rosier and shadows more pronounced."

The second pilot came along with oxygen tubes, and said we should share out and take turns. It was a relief to breathe deeply into these masks, and to fill one's lungs with the warm rather onion-scented air. By degrees the light went out of the day. Evening—then night and blackness. The drumming in ears indicated one was flying lower. A few sparse twinkling lights below, in irregular designs, signified that we had almost arrived. It seemed we stopped moving in the air, so slowly did the engines run. We now descended through gorges, avoiding the mountain edges and the electric cables running above the rivers, and, once again, had grounded. Sounds of relief from all, including guttural noises from the Chinese. The pilot said he thought he had seen Japanese aircraft making towards us before we had escaped into the clouds. I was glad he kept us in ignorance at the time. Not a moment was lost unloading our precious freight. Lorries dashed alongside and within a few minutes were loaded and on their way.

During the following weeks I travelled five thousand miles by truck, sampan, train or airplane. I was given many opportunities of seeing conditions in a country that, apart from the limited air traffic, for years has been cut off from the outside world. Valuable as this air link is, it cannot have an appreciable effect on the four hundred and fifty million people of China. While the enemy is in control of over half her important cities, rivers and railroads, it is as difficult for a foreigner who visits the free territory to get an impression of the real China, as for a traveller to judge America from the Ozark Mountains of the Middle West. All the Europeanised cities, in which, it is agreed, Chinese culture flourished most, are occupied by the Japanese. With the possible exception of the University town of Chengtu, in none of the cities that we have come to hear so much of in recent years is there opportunity to develop the arts of living. Leisure is limited. Few enjoy any comfort. The wealthiest in the land rarely have an opportunity of showing signs of luxury. The West of China consists of the agricultural and more mountainous provinces in which transport has always been poor and existence hard. Life in these paddy fields and small dark villages can have changed little with the passing of the dynasties. From early childhood till oldest age, from dawn until dark, every day of his life, the labourer toils for the minimum reward. The carrier-coolie, his head bent sideways, minces, like Agag, under his appalling load. The farmer, almost naked, with legs as muscular as Nijinsky's and wide apart as a wrestler's, plants in the swamps, with zealous speed, the small aigrettes of riceshoots. The water-traders at the wheels, covered with sweat, defy by the hour the laws of gravity and cause water to run uphill. The river coolies, in the rain, wearing the short capes of palm-tree fibre that, although of a design thousands of years old, are distinctly fashionable in appearance, strain at every limb as they fight the unpredictable currents and the evil spirits beneath the water; stolid young women weed in the mire, or thresh vigor-

ously throughout the heat of the day; children, with a wisp of bamboo, drive the herds of goats and gaggles of geese; the old women pick the leaves off the tea trees, or tie little bags, against the onslaught of birds, over the ripening plums. With infinite patience, everybody fights against discouragement and disintegration, and in the face of all disasters their spirit remains unbroken and unbreakable. When others would despair the Chinese smile with contentment, for they are of the Celestial Kingdom. Each farmer, coolie and soldier feels about his lot as did Shao Yung: "I am happy," he said, "because I am human and not an animal; a male and not a female; a Chinese and not a barbarian; because I live in Loyang, the most wonderful city in all the world." Smiles and laughter are never distant; they are the ever recurrent theme that runs through the overcrowded bamboo villages and newly-bombed towns, along the lines of coolies, human beasts of burden, in the curving mountain passes, down the river banks where millions make their homes in flimsy, overcrowded sampans. Smiles appear at the misfortune of others, at moments of terror or anxiety; they are a means of "saving face", are present at both birth and death (the two "great happinesses"). The Chinese sense of humour, easy recognition of the comic and inveterate optimism combine with the national feeling of resignation to help them bear the misery—sometimes cruelly unnecessary—of present-day conditions.

In fact, the silent, inscrutable Chinese, who moves noiselessly and laconically through the pages of fiction, is an invention that bears no relation to the sturdy, boisterous people I saw working for existence. I found the Chinese demonstrative and highly strung, easily roused to excitement or anger. They are apt to blush more often than the English, while a rapid change of expression adds much to the charm of these uninhibited extroverts. White teeth flash; eyes are tightly screwed up in an access of convulsive mirth. I marvelled at the eloquence with which the Chinese physiognomy expresses different emotions, indicating in turn inquisitiveness, surprise, greed, terror or embarrassment. By the grimace he makes, we know how far a coolie has trudged, how rough the way has been, how heavy his load. As he toils up a precipitous slope, his contorted features resemble those of a martyred saint; yet when he reaches the summit to rest for a moment, the expression of relief is beatific. Every police-boy, perched high on a concrete rostrum at the crossroads, gives an heroic pantomime performance. Running the gamut of facial expression, he directs the traffic with the gestures of a great actor. With what scorn does he observe a driver whose engine has broken down; with what unabashed amusement does he witness some ridiculous mishap to a passer-by; with what popping of eyes and wild contortion of muscles does he control the ferocious rush of the approaching traffic!

Unlike the "otherworldly" Chinese of legend, contemplating by the hour a bird on a tree or a flower in a vase, most of the people I met were shrewd and business-like realists. And then, one has only to spend a single night in a rickety native hostel to discover just how "soft-footed" the Chinese are! A traveller who wants to sleep must contest against the noise of furniture being lugged over the resilient floors of the rooms above, a Niagara of family gossip that continues outside his door all night, and the singing of a neighbour "in good spirits". The Chinese is no lover of

silence—witness the noise in any restaurant, with cooks and waiters hulloaing, babies catawauling, parties at neighbouring tables celebrating an anniversary, or playing raucous gambling games, with dogs barking, cymbals being beaten and brass bands braying in the street outside.

The Chinese of fiction is always delicately proportioned with an ivory-coloured skin. In reality, he is often husky, squat, with over-developed muscles and a thick bull-neck, and his skin is of a healthy apricot hue. Although the colouring of his hair is monotonous, his appearance otherwise varies to an astonishing extent. His mouth, being finely chiselled, is his best feature (just as it is an Englishman's worst), and his eyes, which seldom show any lids, turn down at the outer corners.

Pidgin English is scorned and seldom heard. If the Chinese speaks the English language, it is apt to be with grammatical perfection, a much wider vocabulary than the average Englishman employs, and possibly a strong Chicago accent.

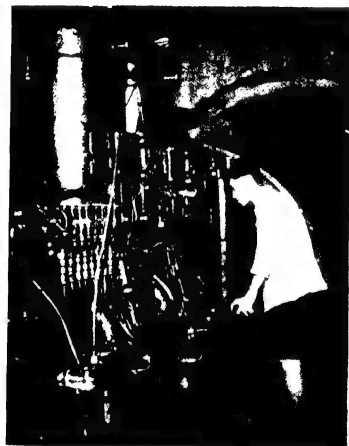
During the last painful years China has struggled on, in spite of appalling shortages of equipment (including heavy weapons), transportation (including fuel) and all sorts of medicines. The Chinese genius for the makeshift has stood her in good stead. As the Japanese approach, the Chinese tear up the railway lines to make them into guns. The scarcity of petrol has promoted the discovery that trucks and lorries can be run on camphor, alcohol, locally produced wines and spirits, and on crude oil made from the Tung nuts that grow on the hillsides. Lorries, that might have been considered to have done good service after travelling these roads for a twelvemonth, are, after four years, in spite of the non-existence of spare parts, seen hurtling along the mountain passes with seven separate pieces of outer tyre bolted on to their wheels; the driver bangs frantically on his door to warn pedestrians, for the horn and brakes are missing. As the truck vanishes round a hairpin bend the air is filled with a pungent reek of moth-balls—anyone who has travelled in a camphor-run vehicle for a few hours is recognisable for many days to come.

Merchandise is floated down the rivers on improvised bamboo rafts. The winding roads to the forward areas are flanked by a chain of human carriers, whose strength and tenacity enable them to cover one hundred miles of rough mountain path in four days. Young boys of the Transport Corps in pale, chutney-coloured uniforms, with straw-sandalled feet, stagger along under heavy yokes. Old coolies in huge hats, protection alike against sun and rain, push a small mountain of salt on their wheelbarrows, mules are saddled with baskets, tiny Chinese tots become charcoal porters, cows carry coal. The power and endurance of the Chinese is proverbial: troops live for days on end exposed to extremes of cold and heat, sustained by the minimum of rice. When a soldier falls ill, he is the most long-suffering of patients. I saw men, all but dead of Relapsing Fever one day, who three days later had given up their beds to more deserving cases.

The farmer has learnt the habit of complete frugality. In addition to his bowls of rice, he allows himself only a few dice of chopped pork every



(Above) Salt Well



(Left) Underground War Factory

(Below) Making Radio Transmitters
and Naval Dockyard





The Paddy Field

month. He makes his own oil for the lamp from rape seed, and for fuel, instead of using charcoal, he burns dried grass. Accustomed to disaster, the average Chinese does not worry about his future prospects. Used to suffering, he takes a fatalistic view of personal tragedies. No bad news can lower his spirits for long. As soon as the floods, which have washed away his toil of years, have subsided, he starts to work afresh. The rebuilding of a bombed town is begun almost as soon as the "Raiders Past" sirens have sounded. This stoic power of resistance constitutes a formidable threat to the Japanese invader. Such is the scale of the country that a regular army of six million Chinese operates behind the enemy lines. The Japanese have learnt, to their chagrin, that the Frenchman spoke wisely when he said that China was not so much a country as a "geographical expression".

Throughout Free China, for thousands of square miles, the villages resemble one another in all the essentials. Houses are dark, smoky, with grey walls and black tiled roofs; the inhabitants, wearing the invariable indigo-dyed cloth that fades through so many varieties of blue to pale grey, move about their business in an inextricable confusion of scraggy chickens, pigs, pei-dogs and babies. Sturdy stocky women, over bowls of rice, use their chopsticks like shovels. The walls of old temples are somewhat unæsthetically decorated with stencilled heads of the Generalissimo. In tea-houses of bamboo-matting, the tea-drinkers smoke pipes three feet long, while they listen to the itinerant professional story-teller; a precocious child, who accentuates his points with blood-curdling grimaces and a nerve-shattering clash of cymbals.

In contrast to the darkness and penetrating odours of the village streets, the natural scenery of the country is of an extraordinary grandeur and richness. Fantastic mountains, like upturned stalactites, half-veiled in mist; gigantic waterfalls; hillsides covered with fronds of bamboo or with wild azaleas; ascending pale green steps of rice fields, as eloquent as a flight of steps at Versailles; white wild roses rambling in bridal bouquets



alongside a stream, or climbing over a tree sixty feet high; sweet-smelling camphor groves and jasmine—these are the natural luxuries of the poor, in a country vastly over-populated, little industrialised, essentially peace-loving, and seldom left in peace.

Perched on the feathery slopes that rise from the junction of the two rivers, the Yangtse and the Kialing, Chungking, most beautifully endowed by nature, has been made by man into one of the ugliest cities in the world. Although it has the oldest records in China, it possesses no architectural distinction; and the fertile surrounding hills have been defaced with ugly "Golders Green" villas of sooty cement and gritty lavatory brick. Chungking is now four times the size it was before the war; and buildings appear overnight like mushrooms. In the commercial part of the town, some buildings imitate American skyscrapers in ersatz black marble. The poor material of The New Life Compound and its surrounding buildings reminded me of the drabest days of Russia after the Revolution. Only down the steep steps to the river's edge, where activity is greatest, day and night, do the buildings seem to be indigenous. If the poorest Chinese wishes an extra room in his house, he builds one in mid-air, projecting from the already flimsy bamboo structure. Somehow this system works; the family are seen enjoying their tea aloft, open to the gaze of the world, while they, in their turn, with infinite curiosity, watch the everyday activities below. Clustered together in a "Heath Robinson" confusion, some of these bamboo dwellings are built for only a few months in the year, until the river starts its rise of anything from fifty to over a hundred feet, and the impromptu villages vanish.

The shops are filled with garish needlework, with shoes of good quality, and with tea-sets in dozens, all ugly and tasteless. In the markets, the vegetables are of a surprising emerald green; and in the cafés the macaroni and sugar foods are golden and appetising. Occupants of rickshaws lie back with extended stomachs; the coolies have an aged youthfulness as they run through the mud on flat feet. There is a good deal of money to be made. Even if values have changed, the coolies are richer than before—they are paid three thousand dollars a month—and they carry wads of notes. To lift a grand piano across the river now costs forty thousand dollars.

In the country, every square inch of the brilliant, cedar-coloured earth is cultivated for food. The steepest slopes grow rice, even if the cultivation-strips are only a few inches wide: the swirling outlines of these terraces suggest a painting by Van Gogh.

CHAPTER VII

JOURNEY TO AN EASTERN FRONT

AFTER only a few days in Chungking, I left, in company with General Gordon Grimsdale, G.O.C. British Military Mission in China, and Major Leo Handley-Derry, on a tour of the various British Military Missions in Free China. It was an unrivalled opportunity to see much that I could not have seen otherwise. Although we should not be able to visit the front-line armies, we might be allowed within a few miles of the Forward Areas. There was at that time no possibility of visiting the Communist areas at Yen-an, or areas in Shansi. Here are some extracts from my diary, written en route:—

Kunming. The town is laid out with streets running in the four cardinal directions. There are ceremonial gates, carved pagodas and gilded arches, and an old city wall, now in the process of being pulled down. To-day the Chinese consider walled cities as part of an ignoble past: horrible modern buildings, of no particular architecture, are put up hurriedly instead; thus everywhere there are bogus Spanish palaces and imitation Corbusier banks and cinemas. No rich merchant would dream of building himself a Chinese house.

The jagged mountains, of a limestone so weathered that the outline looks like the temperature chart of a consumptive invalid, are not only of great geological interest, but prove that those extraordinary landscape backgrounds of Sung paintings were, in fact, true to nature. The people here, until six years ago, had rarely seen a motor car, but have now become accustomed to lorries and jeeps jamming the thoroughfares, and to the sound of airplanes, which day and night fill the air as they bring in supplies from the remote outside world.

In the seventh year of war, most people seem to have given their attention to rebuilding and the interests of their family. Only professional politicians are interested in politics.

The air-raid siren sounded; the sky vibrated with the roar of aircraft; but the enemy machines were flying too high to be seen. The crowds trekked to the caves in the mountains. These warrens extend along the entire range and form an impregnable underground fortress; the whole town can shelter here. Nobody showed any signs of anxiety; in fact, the occasion was treated as a picnic; kitchens were set up outside the caves, and the children played organised games.

We went to call upon General Chennault. His room had a collegiate atmosphere, with flags and trophies. We were given cups of coffee—a

great luxury. General Chennault, looking like a footballer somewhat battered after a victorious match, sat at a table behind a sign on which his name, perhaps rather unnecessarily, was printed in large letters. No other individual has done more for China in her fight against Japan. Before the attack on Pearl Harbour, his group of American volunteer pilots, the Flying Tigers, had written a wonderful little page of history. Now he is Chief of the U.S. Army Air Force in China: without his contribution, events in the Eastern theatre might have taken a very different



General Chennault

course. His task has never been easy; he is always short of aircraft, supplies and co-operation; yet the personal effect he produces is one of wealth and magnanimity. Come what may, he maintains an unruffled calm and creates confidence in others. Formerly a renowned fighter pilot, the inventor of tactics that revolutionised aerial warfare, he knows every aspect of flying from personal experience. After the last war he organised commercial air-circuses that toured America. For five years he was Chief Instructor of the Chinese Air Force Cadet School. At his desk he now deals simultaneously with Washington and Chungking, as he directs the manifold policies and tendencies of his vast organisation.

With the passage of years, he has become a little deaf; his mouth is

tight-bitten and turns down at the corners. His complexion, yellow, as if stained by walnut juice, is pitted with deep crevices, and the skin around the jaw and neck is as wrinkled as the leather of the poor quality wind-breaker that he wears, with the Flying Tiger painted crudely on the pocket. His black shaggy hair is beginning to be peppered with grey. Yet there is much about him that refuses to grow up. His shyness and utter simplicity are boyish qualities; his Red Indian eyes have a schoolroom mischief in them; and it is only when members of his staff come in that one has a glimpse of the power that he wields so quietly.

He reads their suggestions. "No—that leaves a loophole—phrase that sentence differently, more emphatically. No, you didn't quite get my thought there." He starts to write. Much of his work is now largely a matter of literary composition. The free and easy side of American army life is here exemplified. Perhaps Americans take all generals as a sort of joke—a joke particularly enjoyed by generals—and doubtless are right in doing so. "Hey General," said his secretary. "Hadn't you better put your blouse on?"

"Where's the General's blouse?" enquired some other member of his staff. The cry was taken up—"Where's the General's blouse? Anyone seen a General's blouse? The General's lost his blouse!" At last someone stretched out an arm.

"Here'y'are, General!" And with a wry smile and a shake of his head, the General changed his tunic.

Kweilin. The Americans have a particular knack of making themselves at home wherever they may be. This is not just a question of money. Here, you would think it difficult for them to find anything they could enjoy, there is almost no kind of amusement to which they are accustomed. Nevertheless they chum up with all and sundry—thereby sometimes losing face—pick up local slang and yell from their jeeps in reply to the welcoming village children. They drink the local rice wine; they organise rickshaw races; for the nonce they are carriers, not carried. Down the centre of the main street comes a stampede: terrified coolies sit back in the place of honour, until the climax is reached with a general upheaval of rickshaws. Dollar notes are brought out in thousands, to pay for the fun and damage.

The English are less adaptable. They maintain, in the face of all difficulties, a completely English atmosphere in whatever distant part of China they may happen to make their headquarters. At all costs they must have food cooked in the English style. Cooking at home is not always of a high standard: it is lower in China. There are certain groups of Englishmen in China to-day, living contentedly in an acme of unnecessary discomfort. Field Marshal Sir Henry Maitland-Wilson is said to have remarked: "Any fool can make himself uncomfortable."

The farther men are situated from any big town, the higher seems morale. Groups of officers, living together in the mountains, who have not seen electric light or tasted liquor for two years, but for whom time has no longer any reality, and who know that it may be many years

before they see their homes again, are as free of rivalry, petty jealousy or personal ambition as sailors on a great ship at sea. An enormous amount of magnanimity, tact and patience is shown under exasperating circumstances. Similarly, isolation and the sharing of difficulties have brought about harmonious and deeply sympathetic relationship between the English and Americans, whose lot has been cast in this distant theatre of war.

Kwellin. Friday, April 14th. Up very early: a slate sky: the anxiety of shaving, dressing and packing: yet we were in good time for the truck that was to take us to the aircraft. But now the clouds were low, and the humped mountains were hidden. Rain started. Thunder crashed through the hills. The downpour was tropical. We sat waiting in our suburban, almost empty, bungalow. The servant girl moved the dirt from one side of the floor to another. We hung around. We made conversation spasmodically. Hemingway, our host, wandered about with wrinkled forehead and a cigarette tight between his lips. He blinked at the rainy window panes. Would we take off under these conditions? The lorry was very late. More rain. Our baggage, neatly packed, stood ready by the door. We read again and again a few old magazines. I unpacked a book. The rain poured down. Leo and I looked at one another in dejection. All our elaborate arrangements for nothing! Wires and signals had been sent—important you arrive such and such a day—but here we were, in a draughty villa, watching the rain beat down on the muddy yard and desolate front garden.

At last a message arrived—no “taking-off” to-day. We unrolled the bedding. Meanwhile the bungalow became cold and excessively damp, but there was not such a thing as a stove or a fireplace. I spent the morning indoors, as on a winter crossing of the Atlantic, wrapped in an overcoat, with a rug over my tropically clad legs. The others went out. The stillness of the empty house was infinitely preferable to the restlessness of the mess room at the British Military Mission. Hemingway returned alone for lunch. We ate hungrily the rations allotted for three. We visited the Consul. He discussed prices. We called on Mrs. Bacon, widow of a Missionary Doctor, who runs a hospital here.

She is over seventy and has lived in the same temporary shack over thirty-five years. She has thick glasses, the thinnest of legs, a bright manner in which Chinese compliments are parodied (your honourable visit to my unworthy house) and a lack of selfishness that makes me feel a swine. All her time and energy are given to nursing and helping others. She is a first-rate doctor and looks after seventy beds in the hospital. The total amount of good that she must have done during her long life is incalculable. She complains about nothing, yet existence is not easy for her. Her junior doctor and assistant had gone off to Hong Kong to buy drugs for her, and had got caught there by the Japanese. I find myself more and more dependant on outside help: Mrs. Bacon provided an impressive lesson in serenity. An Australian spinster has lived with her for many years; but they still call one another “Mrs. Bacon” and “Miss Willcox”. They have no radio. On the table I saw a magazine marked—

"This is valuable; it has been flown out by air at great expense; it must be sent on to Kweiyang by April 17th and to Hengchowfu by March 3rd." . . . Miss Willcox rushed in. "The Rev. So-and-So has a temperature of 105 degrees"; and out ran Mrs. Bacon.

During the next few days, while we remained in the Kweilin bungalow, and the rain poured down and the mud rose higher, the tone of my diary grows more and more depressing. Here are a few further extracts:

April 15th. The usual nonsense of no departure; the rain still falling. The Sugar Loaf hills no more to be seen; the clouds, as the pilots say, are "stuffed". Too dangerous for flying, but the hell of it is that we have to be ready for early departure, "just in case", with the beds packed up each time.

The bungalow reverberates with hollow sounds; the rain pours. The mud in the courtyard encroaches upon all floors. I look again at the magazines, at odds and ends, at the pinned up *Illustrated London News* pages on the wall, even unpinning them to see what is on the backs—(advertisements: Huntley & Palmer, Johnnie Walker).

News comes: we will not be leaving to-day, and "so", suggests Hemingway, "what about a game of Camaroon?" I am too dazed and sleepy to read the dice clearly, and we are all conscious that this game is a last resort. I get some idea of how a prisoner of war must feel. The first trapped minutes are the worst.

A dinner party was given, consisting of six British Officers, with four Chinese friends. There were about twelve different courses. A fish that tasted like meat; a meat that was like fish; delicious emerald vegetables; wonderful soups with floating egg wisps in them; mushrooms; young chickens' legs; unidentifiable dishes with unknown savours. For me, the occasion was marred by the toasts that accompanied each course, with "no heel taps". The ceremonial brew, made of orange juice and rice liquor, called Simhwa (three flowers), tasted of turpentine and was rather intoxicating. Chinese table manners differ from our own—rice is shovelled from the bowl to the mouth with fanatical enthusiasm. The *pièce de résistance* of the meal—a huge fish-head—was eaten by one of our guests in a particularly messy way. By the end of the evening the tablecloth resembled a deserted battlefield. Hot towels were handed around; more toasts; a rowdy celebration with crowds who came to watch us from behind a trellis.

Rickshaw coolies ran through mud and rain in large Ascot hats. With their wide-shouldered capes made of bark, which looks like monkey fur, they suggested society hostesses arrayed in the height of fashion. I enjoyed enormously being borne along, through the squelching mud, by someone who looked from the back exactly like Mrs. James Corrigan.

At first it gave me a shock to see one human being being carried by another. But is riding in a rickshaw any worse than being rowed in a boat?

Besides, what a romantic effect a rickshaw is capable of producing! No sedan chair, howdah, phaeton, equipage or limousine is more becoming to a woman. I saw a Chinese girl, with rouged cheeks, lying back as she was whirled along, sufficiently near to be of this earth, yet desirable as only the unattainable can be.

Sunday, April 16th. If it were not for the fact that escape is impossible, that our prolonged visit is enforced, no doubt it would be interesting to explore the town. But the incessant rain damps not only all one's shirts and one's bed, but one's spirits as well. Kweilin is mediæval, with its dirt, and the rats which run about the restaurants unheeded; everyone spits on the floor; mediæval too is the stench of stagnant water, smoke and cooking.

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Once more we awoke to a thick mist; the mountains had disappeared in the rain. With no possibility of departure, we took a chance on not rolling up the bedding, and more or less resigned ourselves to life in this empty bungalow. The wet feet of the servants bringing the mud from the yard outside trampled on one's nerves. A History of China sent me into a muzzy trance; the servants and clerks doing their chores were our liveliest interruption. A strange Chinese woman in Western clothes came in, and sat around; killed time writing notes, looked through the contents of her handbag and sang to herself. I discovered that she works at a hostel attached to a large cement factory. She looked Gauguinesque, like an enormous fruit, and I asked if I might draw her. She giggled; cut chunks off her nails with a huge pair of scissors and sang hysterically. She would not keep still and continued coyly showing off.

In a dilapidated house, rented for a vast sum from the local profiteer, the China British Army Aid Group has its headquarters. The Mess, in spite of its broken down armchairs, ragged magazines and incessant interruptions, might be an extraordinarily interesting place to visit. Most of the men have had tremendous experiences, but are working at high pressure on work of the utmost secrecy so that none of them willingly discusses his work, knowing that the lives of many are dependent on his discretion. I find that, if I have energy enough to get the conversation going on any definite track, the effort is richly rewarded. Few specialists are bores on their own subject; but it makes me self-conscious to talk in a room full of a gallant but taciturn band of officers. I talk to an elderly grey-haired man who says he was a contemporary of mine, and that at my first preparatory school he and Evelyn Waugh were beaten for twisting my arm.

* * * * *

We dined at a Mongolian eating house by the light of one oil-wick. There was a charcoal brazier in the centre of the table, and on this was placed a large earthenware bowl full of boiling water. The table was then littered with plates of the most appetising-looking raw foods—ivory vegetables, viridian vegetables, strips of chicken breast, shining slices of

mutton, and small chopped pieces of onion shoots and garlic. Eggs were brought in by the dozen and cracked on the edge of the bowl into the bubbling water; each of us made a fanciful addition to the already savoury brew. We would add a slither of liver, some cabbage, bean-shoots, spinach, mustard or silken chicken. After a few minutes interval, each took his pick with the chopsticks. Not only did the different materials add to one another's flavour, and the ever-increasing fragrance of the stew heighten one's enjoyment; but, having seen the ingredients raw, one felt that the result must be particularly nutritious. One of the British Officers said: "I'm sure after this meal I'll have a wet dream to-night." We were served by a Northern Chinese boy, looking like a wrestler, who brought in successive dishes with a series of peculiar nods and bows.

Through the rain in rickshaws to the theatre. A vast audience sat in the palely lit wooden auditorium, or swarmed on to the sides of the stage. It was a singularly sweet-smelling audience; Russian audiences smell of baked apples, English of mutton; the Chinese do not emanate body-odour, unlike the Indians, the negroes or the French. It was a remarkably youthful gathering. Everyone looked gay and pleased with life; all were busy fanning themselves, eating, talking, certainly amused by the play, but more amused by life in general.

The play, given in Cantonese, with women playing the female roles generally allotted to young men, was traditional, but jazzed-up with the help of elaborate changes of scenery and the inclusion of a saxophone in the orchestra. Although I understood little of what was happening, I enjoyed watching the stylised movements of the actors and the cold precision of their performance; their hands immaculate, not a drop of sweat on their foreheads; for a time I found the noise of gongs and cymbals, punctuating the actors' *bon-mots*, rather stimulating to the nerves. The elaborate costumes were extraordinarily beautiful in colour and design, details of embroidery could be admired even by those sitting in the farthest seats. Female characters were resplendent in filigrees of gold and silver thread and different coloured sequins. The costumes of the young men, in scarlet and yellow and pale pistachio green, might have been designed by Picasso.

After watching three scenes of unintelligible back-chat and clowning, of stylised fighting (like ballet), all of which the audience adored, we went behind the scenes. The *coulisses* of the theatre have always had a magic for me; these, being Chinese, seemed all the more mysterious. I noticed how simply effects were obtained. A sheet of paper, with the rough design of each setting, was the only guide for the scene shifters when they changed the acts. The orchestra was placed in a wooden pen on the stage, while above it sat other instrumentalists, who capped each remark with some clanging noise. The lighting effects were inspired, though the light used was necessarily very weak. Here was the theatre reduced to its essentials, independent of all the drawbacks of 1944.

In the communal dressing-room the cast was changing, repairing their mask-like *maquillage*, eating dinner or polishing up their parts from the

script. Ornate head-dresses hung in perfect safety next to a large piece of dried fish; bowls of make-up paint stood on the same table as the actress's meal of eggs and onion shoots; someone was washing his hair in the basin next to the rice bowls. The actors had to fight their way through a dense throng to reach the stage. The barn-like room was lit by only four dim electric bulbs, yet nowhere else have I seen such delicate make-ups. Each face was a work of art, a miniature painting. The pink of the cheeks gains strength as it rises above the eyes; eyebrows are repainted with arcs like antennæ; noses most carefully graduated, with an even fineness, a European could only achieve with a spraying machine. Eyes are painted with the fine point of a paint brush. The effect of the lips being pink, not scarlet, is refreshing. This porcelain finish owes something to the fine quality of the Chinese complexion, but more to consummate artistic skill.

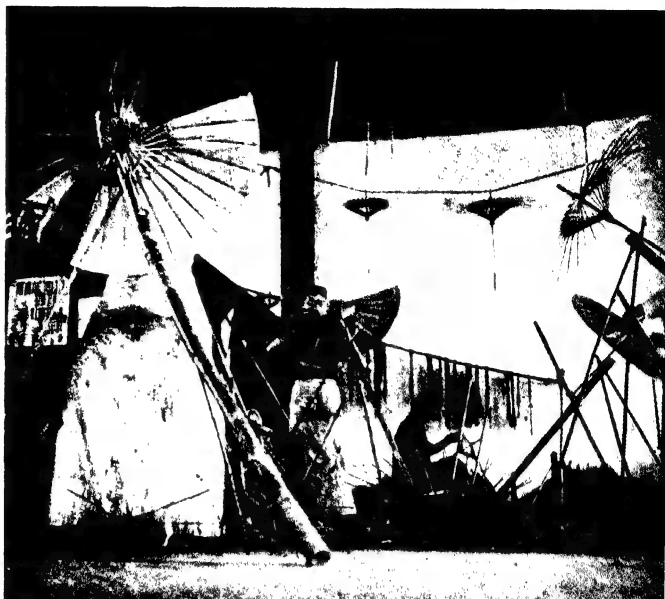
The star had that gift, possessed by all real actors, of increasing his stature when he assumed his costume. As a Manchurian prince, he was tall and majestic. At the end of the performance, when he had doffed his magnificent trappings, he seemed small, rubbery and, except for the unusual twinkle in his eye, quite nondescript.

I was busy doing odd jobs, writing notes, with a nail file scraping the mud off shoes, off my tripod, drying or cooking my shoes on the kitchen stove. We were definitely to leave by air to-morrow morning early; the weather would be satisfactory; a four-thirty call. . . .

Tuesday, 18th. We fidgeted through the night: it was impossible to sleep well with the prospect of having to wake so early. Before four o'clock, the watchman called us. It was dark outside; but we could hear the rain falling. When the day lightened a little we could see the mountains vaguely. But the departure was horrible—I felt quite sick with trepidation, for the rain spurted more viciously than ever, and oozed through the crevices of the fuselage. As we mounted towards the mountains, there were bad-tempered flashes of lightning. Yet, in spite of clouds, in spite of high mountain-tops boring through the clouds, the American pilot triumphed. For the greater part of the way we flew over the clouds; but the moment where we had to come down through them was an alarming one. However, we escaped a collision, flew between the gorges that flanked the Kan river as far as our destination, and arrived at Kanhsien, where thousands of coolies in blue were making an air-station. From my position in the aircraft I could not see why it was we swooped so low over the grass and then shot up again to circle the fields. On the final attempt the runway was cleared of personnel; but the coolies were soon rushed out again to release the wheels of our aircraft which had so soon become embedded in the soft mud. From this point, there are no flying strips, and the journey was to be continued by truck. A young officer, George Dawson, welcomed us. He had been waiting for a week.

* * * * *

Disabled Sailors
making Sunshades



Rickshaw Coolie



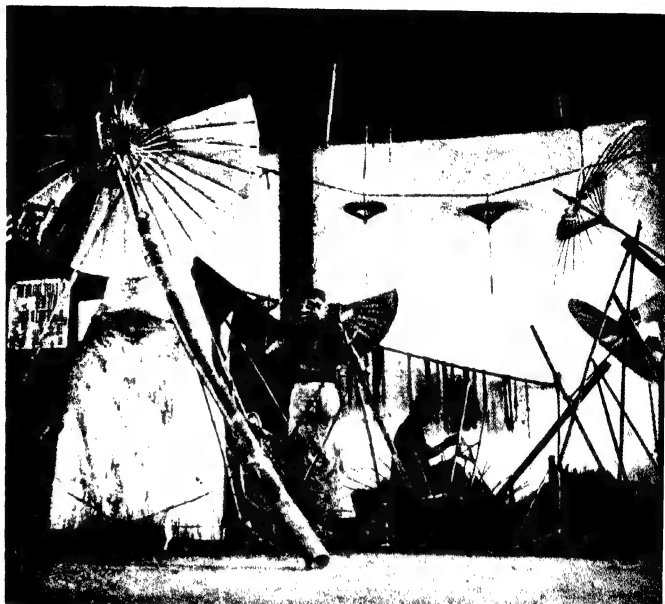
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13-





Feather Dusters

We started off on our trip. We had not gone far when we stopped on the bank of a river. But the ferry was held up by a Chinese lorry in difficulties on the opposite side, an excited crowd around its bonnet. Suddenly the engine caught fire. Shouts : the imperturbable Chinese turned very pink. And several hours passed before we were able to cross, ferried by eight coolies straining rhythmically against long bamboo sweeps. We achieved the other side of the river, and motored through an immaculate town, with exceedingly broad streets and arcades with calligraphic decorations in white and black. This was Kanhsien, wartime capital of Kiangsi Province. The General proceeded to call upon Chiang Ching Kuo, the son of the Generalissimo, the ruler of this town and of four other states. The great man was away, but the visit turned out to be useful. When we set off on our travels again we waited another hour and a half at a second ferry—a bus had got stuck between a ramp and the hill. The ferry coolies and a mixed crowd were struggling to push the heavy vehicle. No success, they could not make it budge. All the while the people inside the bus sat in their places and refused to help. They would wait days on end while someone else did the job, rather than get down. In desperation we decided to stay the night, but the hotel was full; and the magistrate, when we called upon him, invited us to occupy the guest-house of Chiang Ching Kuo, two of whose representatives appeared and asked us to dinner. I had been in one of my cantankerous moods and was rather sour and silent. It was a relief to get a clean lodging, and my spirits improved after I had washed and shaved. In an effort to throw off associations of Kweilin, I discarded all my khaki clothes and brought out my blue suit from my zip-bag. It was extremely damp.

Wherever we went crowds collected around our truck. My camera transformed me into the Pied Piper. The children, who looked like miniature adults and possessed no quality of childishness, recited the English alphabet. The scrofulous heads were revolting and everyone seemed to suffer from an excess of mucus.

During a visit to some American Fathers in a former French Mission, we listened to the Radio news from Burma which had lately been disturbing. The bulletin, though very crackly, was more hopeful—the Japs driven from the Imphal Plain and from Kohima. . . . It was strange to hear a priest saying “What a boy!” and using Broadway slang. One, half-shaven, resembled an over-size pugilist, and came from Pittsburgh; another, dark and bright, came from Boston.

We drank orange-wine and left for our dinner-party, walking for miles through the town. Now the arcades, boarded up during the morning, were a blaze of dazzling electric light bulbs. Nowhere else in China are such illuminations to be seen. Crockery and porcelain, musical instruments, filigree silver, toilet preparations, were displayed in a series of brilliantly lit pictures. There was even a bottle of Scotch whisky for sale. Prices are prohibitive; and even so the shop people prefer not to sell, convinced that prices will rise still higher. Leo asked for some camphor tablets which are made here. Each little cube cost ten shillings. The price had risen two hundred per cent.

Our dinner with the Chinese General (all smiles) and an ex-minister (rather gruff) was staged in one of the best and oldest restaurants in the

ancient and dirty part of the town. In a room which presented an appearance of tragic poverty, with rickety stairs, peeling walls, old newspapers pasted to the ceiling to prevent the dust falling through the cracks, a threadbare red cloth on the table and old faded paper flowers, we had a banquet of exquisite subtlety and refinement. There were about a dozen different dishes, all equally wonderful. Every course was an event. It did not signify that conversation was difficult. We ate. We toasted one another in dumb show. Particularly delicious was a fish junket (hot) with two heads and tails of fish to ornament the dish; wonderful green vegetables; lotus seeds hot and sweet; liver cut to look like under-the-sea plants; bean shoots, crisp and resilient; a big fleshy fish, unskinned, seasoned with fragrant herbs; and duck soup. Such a feast must have cost at least thirty thousand dollars.

I did not enjoy the rice-wine, which is supposed to resemble sherry, but which seems to me oily and redolent of nuts squashed in turpentine. Mercifully our hosts did not insist on our drinking ourselves silly; and the evening ended a few minutes after we had finished the sumptuous repast. As we emerged, the night air was full of every sort of whiff, including opium; and a woman was buying one of the long straw tapers to light her way home into the country. Our guest-house (built without a lavatory or bathroom) proved to be clean and comfortable. For the first time, in what seemed an eternity, I went to bed knowing that I should not be cold.

Wednesday, April 19th. Leaving Kanhsien (also spelt Kanchow, then pronounced Ganjo) we were thrown out into the vast outdoors of China. Perched high on the truck, open to the air, sun, and the varying elements, we had a wonderful view of how the peasant lives in the heart of this unspoilt country. It was springtime; and the scenery looked unbelievably fresh, of an infinite variety of greens, from the pale pristine shoots of the ricefields, banked up in a succession of swirling curves, to the dark viridian squares of the rice nurseries. From the air this neighbourhood had reminded me of an abstract painting by Frances Hodgkins—cocoa colour, rose-pink and pea soup green. On the ground it seemed entirely green—lucid and touching greens—except for the blue distances of mountains and blue-clad peasants.

The day produced a variety of impressions: of large mountains covered with acacias, and trees with aromatic perfumes; of forests that smelt of sperm, of the very juice of spring; of peasants ploughing with buffalo the waterlogged fields of rice, the mud stretching up to the calves of their muscular legs, their thighs powdery with dry flaky mud. Occasionally we saw an old man being carried under the canopy of a sedan chair. The villages were of smoked wood and dark matting. The farmhouses, with dragon roofs curving at the eave-ends, were simply built and beautifully proportioned. Bowls of rice were eaten under the shade of a straw-plaited awning; the children had exposed behinds, and their parents, as if emptying a pot, often turned them upside down.

We had a picnic lunch of bully beef outside a small town. While the others dickered about for some oil for the truck, I went to sleep in the

sun, a handkerchief over my already burnt face. But, of course, there was no oil for the truck; we turned back to a hostel to drink tea. The General suggested we remain the night here, but Leo warned us that all our plans would go wrong if we did not reach Kanchen to-night. So we proceeded. As it turned out, the distance was too far for a comfortable arrival before dark; and no one in their right senses would choose to motor by night in modern China. Bridges are broken, pot-holes become craters, and there is often the risk of bandits.

Rain clouds appeared, soon to deluge us; and we had to cower under the canvas covering of the truck. The light went. We drove on in pitchy darkness. Eventually we arrived at a hostel filled with a roaring mass of Chinese humanity. We were all pretty tired after such a long journey, and I was exasperated by the incessant throat-clearings and spitting of our fellow-guests. While attending our evening meal, a waiter spat with gusto out of the window—another spat heartily in the passage outside my room. All night long I heard babies crying, people spitting and heavy footsteps on bare creaking boards.

Thursday, April 20th. Terrific noises in the early morning. Fresh spitting and renewed guttural throat-rasping. A grey day. We performed the ritual of packing bed rolls, loading truck, then went off to the Mission for a wonderful breakfast of home-cured bacon with Irish Catholic priests.

The Bishop, with amethyst ring, in purple and black, seemed pleased to see us. He described the experience during the months when the Japanese, who had taken this town, were installed in the Mission compound :

"A number of people had come to me for safety," he said. "We were quite a large party for supper. Suddenly a little fellow with knife and gun, eyes blazing, rushed in and snatched the cloth off the table, with all the supper things on it! Heavens above! The clatter and crashing were enough to waken the dead! We all got a shock, for we hadn't been expecting the Japs just yet. We thought they would come in at the main entrance; but no, they came in by the back. Well, we didn't know if it was our turn next." The Bishop laughed, and as he did so, his denture slipped. "Oh, there's a holy uncertainty about my teeth," he remarked in an aside before continuing his story. "The little Jap fellow began to pick up every plate, cup and glass that wasn't broken, and proceeded to make amends. Some of the children started to cry. Just as suddenly as he had come in, the little Jap rushed out. Later, when the Field Commander arrived, it was very difficult to make him understand that I was Irish ; but he must have given orders to leave us alone. But all the time the Japs were here we didn't know how they'd behave next. Some midget would point a gun at your chest, and you never knew whether it would go off—if it had, it wouldn't have cost him a thought. But they were so mean! They'd do such mean things! Anything valuable they'd destroy. One man came in with a hatchet and with three strokes wrecked my typewriter. Another came in with a gun, looked around, and shot the clock. They'd search you and take anything they had a fancy for. They lifted my watch, my fountain pen, and then before leaving the room, kicked me in the stummick. They're little men too, and they know it. We got on to some of their ways. They won't humiliate themselves in front of

foreigners by standing on chairs or a table; so if you want to hide anything you put it on top of a cupboard." The Bishop shook his head wisely, and then nodded as a grave afterthought. "But I am glad I was able to help by being here—worse things might have happened, I declare!"

"Did they loot the place before leaving?" I asked.

"They took everything they could lay their hands on. The village was bereft of everything—as if the locusts had come. On the last night here they ordered everyone out of the village and then set fire to it. Why, the blaze would have pleased the soul of Nero! He could have gone on fiddling all night. Unfortunately there was a wind and this carried the sparks and burning timbers hurtling through the air; and, although we fought the fires in this compound, the rafters caught in the Chapel—one thing leads to another, and by morning all that remained was the little outhouse."

The roads wound around mountains and ravines. Everywhere the peasants were hard at work. After being amazed at what we took to be the sound of a flock of startled geese, we found it to be the noise of wheelbarrows being pushed along the roads. Coolies seem to like this appalling din: perhaps they think it drives away devils; never would they waste grease on oiling a wheel, with the result that the shrieking of unoiled axles resounds throughout the country. A door, too, is all the better if it possesses a squeaking hinge.

From Kiangsi Province we had now arrived in Fukien Province. We were trying to make our night's stop at a small place named Kien-Yung. Picnic lunch by a river; the Chinese cook had forgotten to boil the eggs, so we ate them raw; an idyllic setting; but soon the rain started. Crouched underneath the tarpaulin in the back of the truck we could see nothing of the soused countryside, but were almost asphyxiated with fumes of carbon monoxide spurted out by the exhaust. The rain poured—then stopped.



The hood open, we again surveyed the open Chinese landscape—bamboo, rushes, mountains, rivers, paddyfields. But, once more, the rain began: once more we were condemned to semi-asphyxiation.

Saturday, April 22nd. A night spent in a Chinese Temple came to an early end. Most of us were up by four-thirty. I was in the rearguard at five-thirty. By degrees I am getting accustomed to sleeping on a wooden board; but the pelvis is apt to become painful if one lies on the face too long; I find the skin is peeling on my left hip-bone; a pity I am not fatter. We set off before six o'clock, two trucks following in case we should break down.

Our route to-day took us through the mountainous paths of Chekiang Province. No country could be lovelier. Gigantic gorges and vast mountains in the distance. When seen close at hand, they are covered with every exotic and strange variety of tree; ilexes in new leaf, with pale stylised foliage as in mediæval tapestry; bamboos growing like pipe-cleaners; and there were cascades of blossom; azaleas, mauve, shrimp, scarlet and yellow; a mauve tree covered with waxen trumpets; the flowers of the pummelo bursting from ivory nobs, are the apotheosis of all bridal blossoms, and their perfume is positively celestial. All day, the vistas before our eyes were incredibly lovely and varied; winding rivers, bordered with white rambler-rose bushes and flecked with white shell-like sails; neat terraces filled with gold barley or pale green bristles of rice.

The pathways, made through the mountainsides centuries ago, are still used as shortcuts by the coolies, who push their wheelbarrows, or small carts equipped with a bicycle wheel, throughout the hours of daylight. They look like souls in torment as they lumber past on their flat feet, sweating and flushed under the strain; their life is dedicated to this appalling labour; there are only a few halts to rest or laugh. Someone said, "It's easy for them to die, but their troubles start if they become ill." It was a poignant and upsetting experience to watch this interminable procession of labouring humanity. Even midget children carry loads with an obvious sense of responsibility, and hop out of the way of our truck, terrified but agile. Some of the boys, all dressed alike, carrying swinging baskets, remind one of a chorus in the theatre; now and then the groups of coolies in their pagoda hats and blue trousers look extremely gay and charming. But here is a ghoulisn figure staggering along at a tortoise pace, his torso and arms covered with discoloured patches and spots; his yoke makes life a torture to him. It is comforting to think he may pity us strangers as mere foreign barbarians, while he is a privileged inhabitant of the Middle Kingdom, the Centre of the World.

Leo, unfortunately, pointed out to me the lavatories in one village, and remarked how much the Chinese enjoy sitting in a public place and surveying the passage of life. After this, not only did I catch sight of hundreds of these primitive arrangements of barrels and planks under matting roof; but a horrible stink was seldom long out of my nostrils. As we sped through them, I learnt a lot about life in Chinese villages.

We lunched at a depot of the British Military Mission in Longchuan. Again I was struck by the pathetic plight of these English youths, planted so far from their homes, in a world of new wood, bamboo, mud and flies. Fortunately, their work keeps them extremely busy, but the visual aspect

of their existence is extremely bleak. . . . An Australian took me to see the patchwork of fields from the heights of a hill where we found many graves: a baby wrapped in a basket: a cat. One newly-raised mound contained the victim of the latest village scandal—a woman had been "carrying-on" simultaneously with a soldier and a colonel. The colonel had killed his rival with a sword, made in this town, which is famous for its swords, and the woman was paraded, in disgrace, through the streets.

The next stage of our journey, towards Wenchow, should not have taken us more than four hours to cover; but we are in China; our trucks are old; they have been evacuated down the Burma road and are not meant to last more than a year without new engines; they have not been repaired because there are no spare parts. We broke down. George Dawson,



General Li Mo An

covered with grease, was a most responsible and expert mechanic; but the valves were old; the maintenance people had not done their work properly. We had a glimpse of what travel is like in China during the seventh year of war.

I heard the story of some nuns escaping from the Japs. They drove at night until their truck broke down. During the day the Japs patrolled the road and shot up any moving vehicle. So during the day the nuns repaired the truck under a camouflage of trees, and then on for a bit as darkness fell. For twenty-seven days they travelled thus.

It was a pity that we were late. Elaborate preparations had been made to welcome the G.O.C. A guard of honour and a band had been on waiting since early afternoon. These military arrangements, made in such detail, so often end in chaos. The remnant of daylight faded while we were still on the roadside being passed by energetic coolies on foot. We had still over an hour's normal journeying ahead. At last the engine

revived. We were greeted by varying outposts. Finally, under a bridge, a line of Chinese soldiers and Colonel Larcom of the British Military Mission, who hobbled on a stick, greeted the General.

A less military-looking assemblage than ourselves it would have been difficult to imagine. All sorts of bundles and servants piled anyhow on the van, all wearing different dress; my face had a leprous appearance under a heavy coating of cold cream against sunburn. Our hosts were extremely business-like and kind. We were presented to a dozen Chinese generals, all looking about twenty, and then conducted into a pretty sampan, newly-built of strong-smelling wood; there were Chinese lanterns to light our way as we were paddled down a river. The Chinese C.-in-C. with a small fat rubber face, enormous nostrils and shaved head, and his staff, welcomed us with the usual exchange of compliments. He might have been any age; one cannot tell the age of the Chinese between twenty and forty. In a dining-room decorated with Chinese and English plaques, bearing suitable inscriptions about Sino-British friendship, and photographs of the leaders of the four great powers, stood a huge table covered with oranges and every sort of cake, a row of large variegated flower vases down the centre. The scene had the look of a Christmas festivity in the servants' hall. Speeches interpreted; more speeches; compliments; tea; everyone started to tuck in with enthusiasm. Suddenly, in the next room, an enormous hidden band struck up the most appalling catawauling. When everyone stood to attention, I realised this din was the local rendering of *God Save the King*. The noise was so surprising that I could not keep a straight face and felt utterly ashamed of myself for shaking with convulsive laughter.

On each side of me sat a Chinese soldier who spoke no more English than I speak Chinese. Another stampede, when the hidden band embarked upon the Chinese National Anthem. The noises were as if fifty cats had gone mad. I tried to think of all the most horrifying things that could happen—such as the invasion of the room by hundreds of Japanese who would proceed to slash us all with swords—but even this did not prevent my shoulders shaking at the incredible noises.

This little town is full of character. The narrow streets are canopied with curving, writhing, tiled eaves. There are dark mahogany shops, and much busyness of coffin-making, lantern-painting and a lot of shaving. There are displays of tinsel head-dresses for the dead, and fried foods; a good deal of dirt; many aged women; greedy girls with hair-lips guzzling bowls of rice; children with appalling scabies on their bald heads; and old men spinning silk with hook-like hands. It is always interesting to watch Chinese hands in movement; often they are too delicate and small for my taste, but they are always eloquent.

As interpreter I was given a small man with double glasses and frog eyes, who, I was told, had failed in a mathematical examination in English. He was now accompanying me on a visit to the local actors.

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The interpreter failed again. I became desperate. I got up on to the stage and acted in the wildest and most grandiose manner; Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, the Irvings, Forbes Robertsons, Barrymores, Oliviers and Gielguds had nothing on me. I had hoped that my hamming would inspire the Chinese actors to vie with me. But no—the theatrical celebrities stood around, stunned and dumbfounded. They did not even applaud.

Tuesday, April 25th. A demonstration, involving over a thousand picked troops, was staged for the benefit of General Grimsdale. An inspection; physical exercises, with the Chinese troops falling twenty-five feet from the "Heavenly Gate", performing all sorts of tough manœuvres and firing from all sorts of guns—the experts said they had never seen such guns before. We inspected the Staff School. We climbed mountain sides to watch five imitation Jap trucks ambushed in a gorge. The programme of events was lengthy. Although the average age of the troops was said to be twenty, most of them appeared to be boys. According to the standards of a crack European Regiment, some of the drill did not appear particularly precise, their uniforms were of a poor material, and their sandals of straw; yet these youths put up a magnificent performance, and at the end of the long day, crawling or running up and down mountains, igniting fuses, blowing up targets, firing guns, they seemed as fresh and enthusiastic as if they had just come on parade.

The two-hour interval for lunch was taken up by a great toasting in local wines; bowing from the waist; a nod and a jerk of the cup; a gulp; another bow; and on to the next man; with a lot of Chinese laughter and gaiety. The Chinese C.-in-C. was justifiably pleased at the clockwork precision with which his day was working out. It was fascinating to watch the contrasts in manners; formality, lack of reserve, rasping voices, picking of teeth and noses, voracious eating, simperings and bowings and scrapings; the sibilant tones assumed by this group of bluff Englishmen.

At night there was a dinner at the home of the C.-in-C., whose wife had helped in the preparation of the banquet. About eight different wines were drunk before dinner—Brandy, Maotai (Vodka), Shaoshing (rice wine made nearby), Saké (Japanese wine off a ship sunk off coast here) and Tiger's-Bones. People's faces became very flushed; there were raucous screams of laughter, bowings, more "no-heel taps"—"Bottoms-up"; the interpreters explained, and yelled with mirth. At length we moved to the dining-room. We sat on stools at a high circular table. The General and his wife could hardly be seen above the white cloth. A relay of delicious foods, said to be aphrodisiacs, was put before us, including sharks' fins and syllabub, all served with a hundred frills and decorations.

Wednesday, April 26th. Tropical rain all night. By early morning the compound was flooded. The river had risen six feet and the water leaked through the bamboo matting on to our papers and on to the bed. Woe



Chinese
Commandos





Cavalry Cadet

is me! My stomach troubles were no better, and I came to know the outdoor lavatory almost as well as my own room. It seemed an eternity since I was internally stable: I could hardly remember what life was like when one was not bothered by incessant visitations to an insanitary out-house. A Scottish doctor visited me and prescribed M. and B. This had to come many miles; but when it arrived it gave me confidence. I made one short expedition to H.Q. next door, to see some equipment that they had captured from the Japs. Some local journalists were present to answer questions, but the whole procedure was abortive: "General So-and-So will answer that question, if you will wait." Incessant delays. Most of the information I obtained was at variance with what I had already heard. I was told the Front Line troops did receive, and could send, letters to their family; that they got meat regularly. The rain gushed down and I returned to my drenched shack.

Thursday, April 27th. Pouring rain. The mill-wheel now submerged. We could not leave to-morrow. Everyone in poor spirits, but for myself, the extra day would be a relief, as I felt far from well. I got up to go next door to make a drawing of the Chinese General, but by the end of the morning was thoroughly irritated by the nagging of the interpreter—"General Li wants you to put his stars on this way—Madame Li thinks the neck is too full—Madame Li does not want you to put flowers on her dress."—"Why?"—"She says it's too flowery.—Will you do another one of Madame Li?"



Bridge during the Monsoon

The rain slashed down. I became rather unnerved as the day progressed, for I had apprehensions, though about nothing in particular; and I felt completely trapped. Would I ever return to Western Civilisation? I visualised the possibility of being taken prisoner by the Japs, and wondered how I would survive the mental ordeal. All these ruminations were founded on nothing more sensational than a telephone conversation with Leo, who rang me up to say he would discuss our plans when we met, but that it was unwise to do so now. I knew that the Jap advance was continuing and that in certain sectors, the resistance was slight. However, in such vast country there can be no precipitous invasion; progress must be slow. My qualms were the result of some form of nervous exhaustion.

The Return Journey. "You've got a weak tummy still; you'd better come with us." I sat in the front of the second truck. I enjoyed, as a change, travelling with a new set of companions; nevertheless I had qualms lest our truck should break down and I should be unable to join the others at the lunch halt. We retraced our tracks of weeks ago. The azaleas were now over; double roses, *Rosa Multiflora*, like ramblers, had superseded the big white rose, the *Rosa Cathiensis*, of the voyage out. We caught up with the first truck at a ferry. Dr. Young, the interpreter, like the shopkeeper out of "La Boutique Fantasque", in a panama hat and white suit, was very gay, helping the coolies to row the truck across the swirling river. At this halt I had meant to get into the other truck; but at the crucial moment I was taking a snapshot. The first truck went ahead; we followed.

About half an hour later we were halted by an anxious looking Colonel Larcom, from the first truck, standing alone in the mountain highway with an arm raised. At one side of him, a high wall of rock; on the other, a fifty foot drop to the river.

"We've had a serious accident," he told us. "The truck's gone over there. The General's broken his leg."

Scattered about on the boulders shelving down to the river, lay various members of our vanguard. Bits of luggage, suitcases, umbrellas, and pieces of clothing were hanging on the branches of bamboos. Some Chinese boys walked about, their faces marbled with dark dried blood; one of them looked like a prune. A Chinese soldier and Leo, quite undamaged, propped up the General whose leg was giving him much pain. Below, down by the water, lying prostrate on a crag, was Dr. Young, his suit and hat gore-blotched. A few paces below him at the water's brink, on its side, lay the dead and battered truck. That those inside the truck had not been drowned, that no one had been killed, was a miracle. We were told that the truck had hit a large stone, and had jerked over the precipice, before the driver was able to right the steering wheel. The truck somersaulted several times as it crashed down the rocks below; with each somersault, people and luggage were thrown clear. But for a very short snapshot exposure, I would have been sitting next to the driver, inside the truck, in the place occupied by Dr. Young.

I felt helpless: it was fortunate that a Viennese doctor, who had a huge

trunk of medical equipment, was travelling with us. Bandages were applied; a stretcher made for the General. Bleeding Chinese lay on the roadside, being sick beneath parasols. Poor Dr. Young was unconscious, his huge boots looking as if they did not belong to his body. The General was brave and smiling. We wondered how he could be dragged up the rocky slope? How to place him in a truck? How could he endure the three hours journey back, bumping over the broken road? No, he must go by river. Someone walked miles to the nearest village to try to telephone for a boat, but returned, having found no telephone. Then someone discovered a boat to go back as far as the ferry. The wounded were piled in. At the ferry, the boatman refused to go farther. Some of our party went off to try to find other boats and boatmen. Mr. Lee, the Chinese radio expert with us, managed to recruit six boatmen; but, although there happened to be fifteen sampans in the neighbourhood, no one would take the risk of allowing his boat to go on such a long journey. I was told that this refusal to help was typical of what might happen in a serious crisis.

We felt very forlorn when, three hours later, the wounded were still awaiting removal from the ferry. At last everything was ready. A boat was launched. The Colonel, badly bruised, could not sit up; Dr. Young was still unconscious; the General was in great pain and becoming weak and fretful. The Viennese doctor gave morphine tablets which did not help enough. A few minutes later the boat returned with a heavy leak. At last it was righted and sent off again.

The river was very high after the rains, and was flowing fast. But it was a slow journey. When, hours later, we passed in our truck the mournful shipload, and shouted from the mountain side, the replies were despairing. They doubted if they would be able to make the hospital to-night; there were rapids; the boatmen, afraid of the approaching dark, had begun to give trouble.

On arrival at the ferry, from which we had started this morning, I felt so weak I could hardly tell the story of our misfortunes. Meanwhile, night covered the unhappy boatload as it moved forward slowly among unknown dangers. We received continuous messages of its progress; it had passed such and such a village; only twenty more kilometres to go. Later, we heard shouts announcing its arrival as it passed a bend in the river, and at midnight it finally reached its destination. The recent floods had been helpful; if the river had been either higher or lower, the journey could not have been made in one day.

The local Chinese General ordered the electric light to be kept on until three-thirty a.m. when the doctors finished work. Most of the casualties were not as serious as we had feared. General Grimsdale would have to be flown back to India to have his leg X-rayed; but he could not yet be moved. A few days later, some of us again embarked on the return journey, leaving behind us many of our original companions. Here are a few more jottings from my diary :

The usual maddening delay at the hostel when we arrived at our destination. We were tired and dirty, yet it was over an hour before we were shown a room. "You can't just go up to someone and ask for a thing in China," I was told. "You have to wait around, till by degrees, if you are

lucky, you get part of your request granted." I was really much too exhausted to enjoy this subtlety.

Father Tiffany, the American priest, lives here, in poverty that amounts to destitution. With the present rate of exchange he can afford to buy practically nothing, no pots or pans. He told us that he is not busy nowadays, for so many of his former activities have become too expensive. He cannot travel: to get a boy to carry his bag on the shortest trip costs one thousand dollars. He lives in a small dark room, without enough light to read at night. He is the one white man in the town.

After living alone for years on end, Father Tiffany is in a highly nervous state and smokes continuously cigarettes which he unsuccessfully tries to roll for himself with dirty fingers. He divined my thoughts: "You feel sorry for me, I know. You see me living by myself with no modern conveniences, having to make continuous effort, muscular and mental. But to you, who come from one of the great modern cities, do modern comforts, hot and cold laid on, constant electric light, give real contentment? You are never alone. Every distraction of the city is available to you. Living among crowds you have no opportunity for thinking; moral values are almost completely ignored by modern society; without religious principles, you are free; you can make love with whom you wish, provided you are not too blatant. When the distractions of one city pall, you fly to another, or to any country on earth. Of course I have spells of great restlessness: I'm three years overdue for furlough now. I was due to leave the day Pearl Harbour was raided. I've been out here eleven years now: but you don't feel remote or lonely after a bit. We didn't get any visitors before the war, except Peter Fleming, and no mail here after the war for two years; they wouldn't accept it at the post office. The first months are the worst, and the year before you know you're going on leave. But what is time? Duration expressed in figures on the clock-face. To my mind, the importance of time varies from childhood to old age; and it matters considerably whether we are considering the present or the past, or looking forward to the future."

There were about eighteen people in our truck, when, at last, we set off this morning. Added to our usual number was a Chinese woman with her family of four small children, their nurse, a picture of gloom and despondency, their male companion, also four students who had not money enough to get to their university. The journey was uncomfortably crowded, dusty and hot; the sun gave us headaches. It was a relief when we dumped the large family at their destination, for the children had become dictatorial. The small boy aged seven had been furious when the miserable nurse drank out of the same water-bottle as himself. "Don't you know rules and regulations?" he screamed.

Every small town and village we stay in is redolent of disease. I am bitten by fleas which, I can only trust, are not plague carrying. Each night I go to bed dreading the horrible strangers that appear in the night.

I think and dream of long baths in Calcutta. This morning the Viennese doctor diagnosed the symptoms of one of the orderlies as those of bubonic plague. Macabre jokes. "The Plague Season is on! Have we got a Union Jack? Could we fire a volley with a machine gun?"

My luggage has now become a pitiable mess. My bag, made for air-travel, does not protect any of its contents. The vibration of the truck has caused all the tubes of cream (tooth, shaving and cold) to twist their caps and become perforated; paints have oozed on to cotton wool, on to socks, ties and medicine bottles; my one pair of pyjamas is soused in petrol, and no article of clothing remains undamaged.

I went to call upon two old spinsters, both over seventy—Miss Armstrong, from the West Coast of Ireland, and Miss Wade—in their Mission Compound. They have both been here since 1911, and have lived a fuller life, perhaps, than that they would have enjoyed at home. Here they have become indispensable to the community, treat the local children for all sorts of minor ailments and hold a small court among European passers-by.

While Miss Armstrong sat back, in pain with sciatica, Miss Wade held forth. The non-Christians, the heathens, call her "the Bible Woman", and when she makes an expedition into the country, visiting her pastors, crowds follow her wherever she goes. "They come to see the foreigner, more than to hear the Gospel," she confessed with honesty. "I can walk thirteen miles a day. I generally sleep on a Chinese door taken off its hinges—there are no unwelcome visitors in these boards. You know," she continued, "the Chinese love to pray, they can kneel for hours on end without getting tired—they love it! They come in here from miles around for the four holidays of the year. Christmas is a great time for them."

She sang bits of a hymn, explaining that the harmonium in their sitting-room was so much less strident than the one in the church, but few of the Chinese realised the difference, and they kept this one for their own pleasure.

The truck was crammed. Someone asked, "Could we take three girl students to their school ten lee away?" "Yes." So ten girls turned up. Five were allowed on. Their destination, it transpired, was twenty lee away. We were really very weary. We have travelled over seven hundred miles in this truck. To-morrow, God willing, is our last day of truck travel, and we arrive at Laiyang, the railhead. We ate frogs legs and filleted eel, but I was too tired and on edge to enjoy the dinner. The bill came to nine hundred dollars.

Monday, May 8th. I was called at four-fifteen for the longest lap of our journey, to the railhead at Laiyang. We have been through a variety of ordeals. We have taken it in turns to sit, in comparative comfort, in the

front of the truck; and, when in the back, we have sat on bed-rolls, or stood up holding on to the cross bars while admiring the scenes that fly past so quickly. Ours has been an oddly assorted group. Leslie Shellam, responsible for our comfort and safety, organising our itinerary, paying the bills and taking everything very seriously; Leo, always reserved and stoic; the smiling, happy Chinese driver, never tired, gleefully shouting "Ohay" each time we set off after a halt or setback; Mr. Lee, the young wireless operator going to Laiyang on promotion; another driver being sent back in disgrace for having failed to report that he had venereal disease; and the four students, each with a toothbrush in his breast-pocket, who have spent most of the trip lying asleep on the luggage; somehow they have always managed to get more covered with dust than the others, or maybe it is just because, being originally dressed in black, they show the dust more; their hair has become dun-coloured. In addition to this company, there have been the hitch-hikers from each stopping point; we have taken on five or six at every run. It has been a rough and uncomfortable trip. For this experience, at the present rate of exchange, King George has had to pay out one thousand pounds in petrol alone. It costs one pound to travel each kilometre, and this does not include the oil and running expenses of the truck, or the salaries to be paid to those accompanying us. We have had only the simplest meals, have spent the night in squalid hostels; yet our expenses have worked out at ten pounds a head a day.

A storm broke unexpectedly. The tarpaulin leaked. Everything in the truck became soaked; but eventually we got through to fine weather. I enjoyed standing up as the avenue of trees sped by, and the scenery changed in character. Everything became flatter—patches of dried terracotta earth; fir trees; a few palms; then the plummy tame scenery that I prefer, with smoky green trees perforated by sunlight. A great number of magpies and other birds, shrieks, jays, kingfishers and some huge black butterflies with fat bodies like bats. Everywhere labourers at work. We passed a coal-patch where wretched blackened infants were waddling along, laden with their yoke of heavily filled baskets. We passed miserable looking files of recruits being taken to the war, their guards carrying enormous cutlasses like some weapon out of a mediæval shadow-play. Some miles farther a fugitive was being chased by a guard with a gun. Both looked exhausted, but all my sympathies were with the fugitive and I prayed that he might escape. At the top of one hill, we picked up an American, working for the American equivalent of our Ministry of Economic Warfare. The charcoal burner in which he was travelling had, at five o'clock that morning, left the village on the border of this province in which we had had our tasteless lunch. We felt sorry for him and gave him a lift.

The roads became smooth and our truck behaved well. We arrived in good time at Leiyang, where the British Military Mission H.Q. consisted of a small Chinese farmhouse, that was in the process of being reconstructed. About a dozen workers were still sawing wood, planing more

lathes prior to fixing up walls. A temporary roof consisted of some bamboo matting. Chinese umbrellas, strategically placed, warded off a few of the rain spouts; the ground was a mess of wet shavings and mud. There were a few upright bamboo chairs, half a dozen Chinese clerks were at work in this confusion and some orderlies were carrying on among the carpenters in the half light. By the office-sitting-dining-room there was



Chinese General

an open space on to the village lane; and children in various stages of nudity came to stare. The view of the river was blocked by a latrine, built eight feet away from the dining-table.

A former missionary, now become a major, was in charge here. Once again, I was appalled at the discomfort in which these men live. With the exchange so much against us, and the cost of essentials so exorbitant, it seems foolish to economise on extras, and make Englishmen stranded out here work under unnecessarily hard conditions. To a stranger like myself, this house seemed quite unsuitable for a Headquarters. It had

been chosen because it was equidistant from, and comparatively close to, river, road and railway. But it will be cold, damp and dark in winter—in summer, a fetid fly and mosquito trap. The proximity of the village will certainly breed disease.

The Chinese wireless operator, who had been promoted here, was in despair—"I think it's a revolting place," he said. Meanwhile the rain poured down. For discomfort, nothing could compare with this. Only if the temperature had been many degrees colder could conditions have been worse. As it was, there were mosquitos as well as cold; no glass in any windows, the rain and wind rushing in, the ground so wet that the wood shavings were mashed to a pulp; workmen covering the typewriters with sawdust and clerks idling, as the three young officers conferred under the gaze of the village.

I tried to read: no luck. The noise was terrific. Every upright chair I sat upon was in someone else's way. In the midst of the carpenters' chaos, the cook was preparing dinner and the smoke was such that one could hardly see across the room. The rain poured through the attic windows, dripped through the bamboo matting ceiling with a ping on to the Chinese umbrellas, then with a plop on to the sodden floor. The mud, from outside, was brought upstairs, and on the landing, where about a dozen and a half bamboo beds were strewn with the workmen's clothes. Along the rickety corridor, behind three holes in the wall, our beds were placed. The floor was so unsteady that it sprang up and down at every step.

We were to be called at two o'clock in the morning; and immediately after the evening meal I went to bed. Snores from the labourers: one heard the neighbours talking and their babies crying, as if they were in the room with us. I was too cold to take off my clothes, but so tired that, in spite of interruptions, I was soon asleep. Not for long. The ex-missionary flashed an oil-lamp into my face and, bending low over me, peered through his gig-lamps to see if I were his Chinese orderly. Perhaps it was anger that prevented my going to sleep again for so many hours: that, in addition to the noise of the mechanics talking among themselves. The Chinese are able to sleep through any disturbances. I suppose I must have dozed off eventually; for, when we were called in the middle of the night, it was another shock.

Wednesday, May 10th. The rain bucketed down in angry torrents. By the light of a small lamp we packed our bed-rolls. The trek through the mud and puddles to the truck, half a mile away, did not raise one's spirits. The Chinese do not go out in rainy weather if they can help it, therefore they do nothing about bettering conditions for bad weather. But my depression at having to turn out into this tempest was relieved by the fact that, God willing, we were leaving this dump for ever and ever, amen. On arriving at the station we were told of an hour's delay. But eventually the train was signalled and we trekked through the mud and pools to the far platform. Here there was no shelter. When, at last, we got into the train we were soaked. Our belongings were reduced to a poultice. We all felt cold. We slept sitting bolt upright, but at Henyang we moved to "first class" compartments and lay down to sleep.

My first experience of a Chinese train was not too bad. Nevertheless

insistent rain made life seem very squalid. Wherever I looked there were unattractive sights; women disembowelling animals or pulling the skin off eels, squatting to relieve themselves on the rice fields while they picked their noses or searched in their children's hair for vermin. After seven hours we arrived at the rail-end where we ploughed through the mud to the ferry-boat on the river Chang, for a three-hour trip to Changsha. It was here that three great battles were fought in which the Chinese adopted "magnetic warfare"—instead of offering frontal resistance they withdrew and shifted to the flanks and rear of the enemy. The river was so wide that its banks seemed very distant on this dull, grey day. Leslie, our leader, was cheerful in spite of everything, for he holds Changsha tender in his memories. It contains the Red Cross hostel where a few months ago he had met, and married, his wife. He had been walking for eight and a half days when he arrived back to spend the night here; he had been given a hot bath, tea out of a nice cup, bread and butter. His spirits had soared, for there was a lavatory with a plug that pulled. Someone had said: "Let's go over and see the Red Cross people."

"No, I'm sick of seeing Chinese officials."

"Chinese officials! My eye! They're beautiful English nurses."

Leslie had fallen for romance there and then. His wife is now nursing in India, but the place for him is still full of the old magic.

The compound proved to be American. Some Bible Society had built the place ten years ago, at the cost of many millions of American dollars—a number of red brick buildings of no particular character, but comfortable and, in comparison with anything we had known for the last month, with all the latest amenities. Leslie's face was transformed, his eyes like stars, his teeth shining. He received a rapturous reception from the sisters and everyone else working here, including the Chinese gardener. The chief matron called him by his christian name every second—it recurred like a hiccup.

We were taken care of, fed, given tea, shown our rooms in a doctor's house, and by degrees I returned to normal spirits. To have a bath, wash one's hair, shave, put on a civilian suit, were great events. We had a good dinner in the suburban villa with the nurses. They all asked news in turn of Leslie's "Pat"; till "Pat" became the central character of the evening. Leslie read out some of the dullest passages of her letters, and grinned good-humouredly when adding with a wink "there's a lot more of course." "Pat" had stayed at the Lady Mary Herbert hostel in Calcutta—the Lady Lytton was full. "Pat" had not been able to buy him an English pipe or any tobacco, but had heard there was some at the R.A.F. officers' shop. "Pat" was taking Audrey out for a Chinese meal to-morrow—she would write again. The nurses sat around giggling, or yelling with girlish laughter. Awful jokes were made—"Now, Leslie, what do you mean?"—"Not what you think!"—"How do you know what I am thinking?"—Cups of tea were enjoyed. Most of the nurses wore glasses. One, in particular, was completely unconscious and childlike, her face expressive only of amusement and happiness: it is seldom one sees grown-ups so direct, unspoilt and utterly disarming.

After dinner a small Scots nurse came in with a lantern. "I'm having an awful time with one of the Relapsing Fever cases; he's been out of bed

three times, and has become violent. I can't find Dr. Wong. Would you look at his papers, doctor?" Dr. Flowers, grey-haired, grey-faced, prescribed some palliative, and the night-sister went back to her work. Suddenly one realised the *raison d'être* of these women here: the background of serious work behind a façade of scones and social cups of tea.

In this hospital, there are over one hundred and eighty beds, where many Chinese soldiers die of fever through lack of medicines. The doctors improvise, try to buy substitutes, but meet with much opposition from the Chinese in control, and often earn more jealousy than gratitude. The big hospital is filled to capacity. Many cases cannot be admitted. The out patients gather in their hundreds and are looked after by the housekeeper. It is only when seeing these Englishwomen at their job that one understands their importance. The social trivialities occupy only a very small part of their existence. For the rest of the day they are Empresses, rulers, with the responsibility of sickness or health, life or death, over large kingdoms. I was very much impressed to hear them all speaking fluent Chinese, and treating their patients, not as strange objects to be stared at (which in a way, I confess, was still my attitude) but as fellow sufferers and fellow human beings. Some of the cases were terrible to look upon; but the nurses did not flinch. There had been no battles lately, and, though some of the wards were filled with soldiers suffering from gunshot wounds, these were mostly cases of carelessness (they hammer on a grenade to see if it will go off, and it does!). But many wards contained the Relapsing Fever cases. This disease had been brought to the city by the soldiers; and now many civilians were suffering from this epidemic caused by lice. The soldiers have no change of clothes; they put on their padded garments at the beginning of winter, and do not take them off until summer. Lice breed in the padding; germs get into the blood stream, affecting the kidneys, and the ensuing torture is excruciating. A high fever produces great weakness. The reason for the shortage of sulphur drugs for curing this disease is said to be that the supplies are being kept against the day when their worth will be even greater than now. The local medical authorities tried to arrange that each soldier coming through Changsha should be given a bath and his clothes steamed, but not enough funds could be found for fuel to heat the water.

The nurses joked about being given notice to quit. "They told us it wasn't safe for women and children to remain here. Put that in your letter to Pat, Leslie! They are expecting the Japs. But we were fooled once before. We sent a lot of our drugs away, and it took nine months to get them back! The Chinese are a great people for rumours; they know everything, true and false. No, you needn't start packing up until you hear the pig-squeal of the carts all night long. Then you know the village people are following the wives of the military officers, and moving off with everything they possess on their carts."

A final cup of tea, and then the great luxury of a big, brass, double bed. I slept so soundly that I did not know anything of the air raid—but bombs were dropped and casualties brought in to be looked after by the night-nurses.

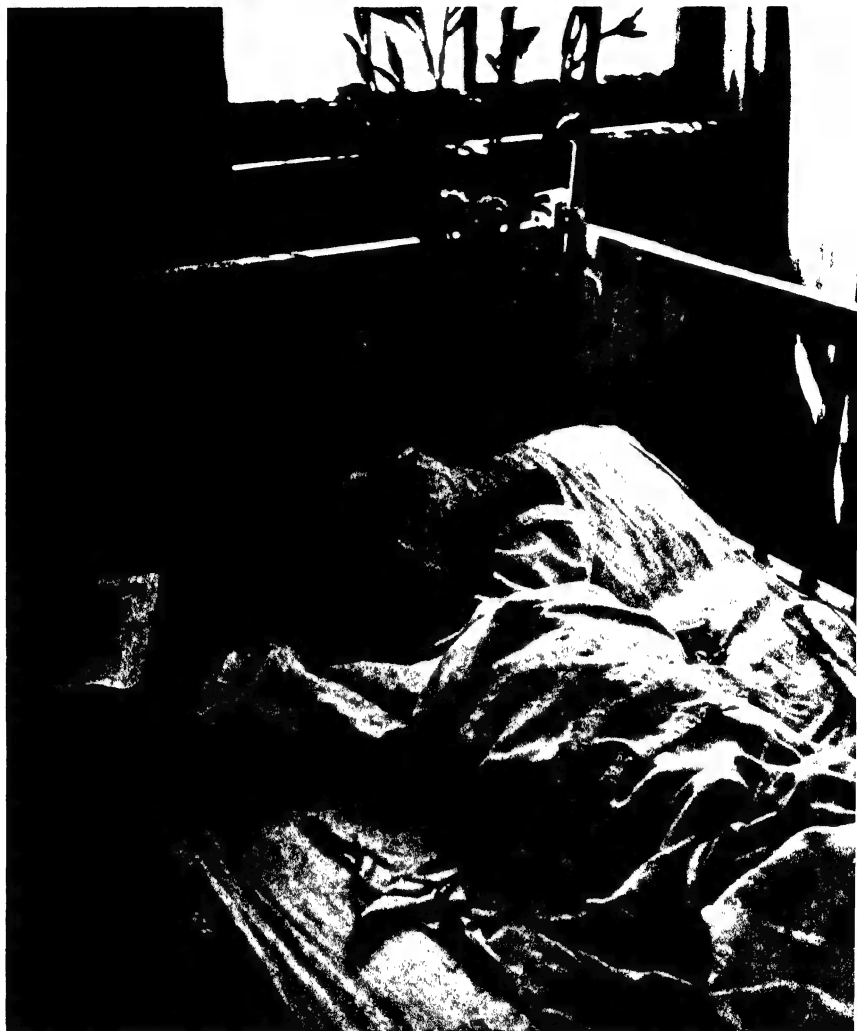
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In the Women's Ward



Air Raid Casualty





Mission Hospital Patient

Thursday, May 11th.

"Are you sugar or not, Leslie? I never can remember!"

"Yes, it's me that is, but Pat isn't."

"I knew Pat wasn't."

"Well, I wasn't either for two days, but I couldn't keep it up."

A great breakfast party, four more arrivals, three Red Cross officers and a nurse, a lot of stores and luggage, and bomb stories of the night to be told.

"Guess what we had in Hengyang?"

"What?"

"Strawberry tart."

"I could throttle you for making us so envious."

"Pardon."

"You've got the wrong serviette, haven't you? You've the flesh pink and not the rose pink. Now come along with me to the Beggars' Home."

Here four hundred destitutes are being cared for by the municipality. There are no beggars in the town, and most of these people have been brought here, victims of war; they are refugees from occupied China. It is a mournful discovery that these people possess nothing in life except perhaps an old eiderdown, under which at night they lie on a wooden platform—till recently they were on the floor. The old women were far the most abjectly pathetic—bald—some deaf and dumb. Some were spinning at wheels, others looked after revolting babies. The children's class was impressive, lessons were repeated in high sing-song voices, a child of six acting as leader. Some of the nurses and doctors of the Red Cross help to look after these people; admiringly I watched the house-keeper stroking the heads of filthy children, and soothing the forehead of an old woman with fever.

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Leo and Leslie took me into the town, but as an air raid alert was on, most of the shops were boarded up. With the official rate of exchange, the prices are fifteen times more for us than for the Chinese; thus some gaudily embroidered satins were one hundred pounds each length, and candles were a pound each. Our craving for sweets led us to pay thirty shillings for a pound of rather ordinary caramels that would cost in England one and sixpence.

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Back at the hospital we found Dr. Flowers preparing to amputate a boy's hand. Later I asked him how the operation had gone.

"Oh, after working on the hand for an hour we brought back feeling into the fingers. It was a near thing, but I think the hand can be saved. But the trouble was due entirely to the Chinese belief in the tourniquet. No tight bandage should ever be kept on for more than two minutes. This boy had cut his wrist: a tourniquet of hair had been applied: this had eaten into the flesh down to the bone and had gone septic. So higher up they had tied a tourniquet of string. Higher still the flesh went putrid. Finally they tied a tourniquet up by the armpit!"

* * * * *

Friday, May 12th. Even to stay one day in the same place now gives one a feeling of settling down. But after this pleasant respite we must again be on our way: bed-rolls packed at five in the morning. It was with a certain misgiving that we tore ourselves away.

Two American missionaries came out of the darkness to put us at our ease. "Yes, we were expecting you." Mr. and Mrs. H—— showed us our room. "Dinner when you're ready."

"Surely it's very late for dinner?"

"Oh, but it's just a question of setting the table again."

Three middle-aged American women, their male counterparts, and a dozen American Air Force ground-staff, were sitting around, rather silent and morose. We ate a good cafeteria meal and joined the community for parlour games. I was amused by the casual way and sing-song voice in which grey-haired Mrs. H—— described the disasters that had befallen her:

"Then they told us to quit Shanghai," she said, "and we were six months on the road, held up three weeks some place because of our passports—oh they did terrible things to us! They didn't make it a *bit* easier for us, and we were dive-bombed, but my husband and I were lying flat at the time, and we didn't catch the blast; you know, it's the blast that's bad, you know how it is when a bomb drops. Then my daughter got permission to return to New York, but it took her such a long time to get home—in mid-ocean her ship caught fire and all the crew were too busy attending to look after the passengers, so they tried to get one of the boats overboard, but it went down lopsided with a lot of people in it, so someone cut one of the ropes and the boat fell plump into the water and broke, and everyone toppled over into the water and were swimming around, and some of them got drowned—but my daughter, oh she was all right, she got picked up and taken to Honolulu and they put her on the Clipper to go home—but they had trouble and had to jump for it, but they all had parachutes—you know how it is with parachutes—you just pull the cord. Meanwhile our home here was bombed—all those rooms there in front went, no wall left you see—you know how it is when a five hundred pound bomb drops."

We heard the story of how a missionary woman in a remote part of China had one particular wish—that her daughter, about to be married, should go to the altar in a white silk dress. Where on earth in China, to-day, could she get white silk? God answered her prayers. He sent her from the skies the required article, in the form of the parachute which was given to her, in return for her hospitality, by an American pilot who had baled out after a raid on Tokio. The only snag was that although she washed and rubbed the silk with lemons, pummalos, oranges and her last piece of soap, nothing could prevent the more observant of the congregation from noticing that, as the bride walked up the aisle, her skirt was marked U.S. ARMY, U.S. ARMY, U.S. ARMY.

Saturday, May 13th. After an American breakfast, with plenty of molasses, we left the Mission Compound to learn our immediate fate at the A.A.F. Hostel. The journey down river by sampan was soothing and agreeable after the smells, dirt and bustle of Chinese streets. On our boat was a Chinese soldier being taken to hospital. I have never seen anyone nearer death. His skin had become greener and more yellowy than his greeny-yellow uniform. He kept groaning, and was so weak that he had to be carried to the top of a flight of stairs where, mercifully, he was put into a rickshaw.

The Americans were in high spirits, said they'd give us a lift to Kweilin, if there was room, next time a transport plane came in. I enjoyed very much listening to their backchat. There are no flies on them. Somehow they manage to achieve a satiny gloss in the roughest surroundings; and even in a remote place like this they organise their comfort on an entirely different scale from ours. Their newly-erected bashas and mess-rooms have a country club atmosphere. Their pin-up girls were cut out of good magazines and really did look covetable. There was a good deal of chatter about mosquito repellent; someone had malaria; everyone must use the repellent to-day. "Not to-morrow, to-day. See that it gets given out—and don't give it to the Chinese; they'll only take it down into the town and sell it."

We enjoyed our stay at the Presbyterian Mission, in an atmosphere of a seaside boarding-house inhabited by Americans. Our hosts were in fine spirits. One of the women had helped deliver twins during the night. Mrs. H—— was busy packing off Bibles by post. Mr. H——, whose function is to address the packages in Chinese characters, sat back, with large paunch, surveying the room-full through pince-nez, while he fanned himself with a large black paper fan. An old wizened Uncle Sam, who said the grace before meals, and a white-skinned doctor, with an unexpectedly deep voice like a chisel, all joined in the singing of hymns and old folk songs, accompanied by a grey-haired lady in pince-nez and a foulard dress, who hit plenty of wrong notes on the upright. Meanwhile, we had bad luck with the chances of hitch-hiking on a transport plane; and after a time, unable to sustain enjoyment of parlour games and folk songs, we decided to board the next train.

Monday, May 15th. Early start for our train. A long and frenzied walk to the station—arrived in great heat and sweat—a slow train leaving at seven a.m. "It should arrive at seven p.m. at Kweilin," some said: others said, "nine". Distance, four hundred miles. Train travelled at snail's pace. To begin with one did not notice stops at every station and meaningless halts in between; then hot, thunderous weather turned to storm; rain poured down and came through ceiling of coach on to the leather arm of my seat—and bugs came out. We killed some with the end of a spoon. Chinese in carriage (second class—no firsts!) spat gutturally, grunted,

farted, yawned with the noise of bellowing cows, picked spots on their faces for hours on end or excavated their nostrils, blew their noses in their fingers, then rubbed their fingers on chair-seats or wall. No one had any inhibitions or false modesty; men lying with feet out of windows, women feeding babies at breast, everyone making their own personal addition to the general pandemonium. By degrees the energy, stored up during the night, seeped out of every pore of the body, and I became too tired to read. Leo talked about China. Before the war his firm planted twenty thousand trees: a small proportion were eventually to be used as pit props. They were policed for protection; but of late, this had become impossible. Within a year all the trees had been cut down, stolen, sold or used for fuel. The people are so poor, know so well the horror of poverty, that whenever they can see a rare opportunity of rising above a degree over starvation-level they feel they would be foolish to miss it.

The last part of the journey was almost intolerable. We were exhausted. For sixteen hours we had been sitting in the same bug-infested seats. Large bumps arose on wrists and arms. There was not sufficient light to read. At Kweilin North Station we started shunting backwards and forwards. After one hour and a quarter, we were back in the same station from which we had been painfully jolted. The Chinese bellowed, then yawned, emitting every sort of revolting noise and smell. When, more dead than alive, we eventually arrived at Kweilin South, we had to wade through mud ankle high to get to a truck. We came back to Hemingway's villa. I must admit that, by comparison with our various lodgings during the interval, I found it comfortable and even luxurious. To a much larger extent than I realised I had been broken in to squalor.

Tuesday, May 16th. Mr. Priestley is said to have given a talk on the radio about a typical Chinese who spends all his money on some single object of beauty; how, when he walks along the street, he pauses to admire a tree, and a little farther, stops to listen to the note of a bird; how he will spend hours contemplating one perfect bloom. What utter bosh! He is much more likely to espy a particularly large cake of cow-dung and rush to take it home before anyone else gets it!

The evening was a pleasant change: drinks with a sybaritic giant called Fletcher; talk of Vuillard, Bonnard and other such names never mentioned during the last months. It was the first time for weeks that we sat on upholstered seats; gin tasted delicious.

This expedition into the Chinese blue has been an overwhelming experience. It has thrown me back on to my own resources without any aids to escapism. There have been days when I have had nothing to occupy me but my own thoughts; and my thoughts much of the time have been disturbing. I have always been unlike the majority of people. Since I have built up a life to suit my own interests, I have become more and more a specialist, disinterested and remote from the world in general. Most people are interested in a greater variety of subjects, yet in few of the subjects that I find absorbing. This shaking-up has stirred me in a most wholesome way. It has been just what I needed. The unpleasant side

of the trip has been beneficial too; for it does no one harm to get tired, to walk too much, to be either too hot or too cold, to go hungry for a few hours and to use what Dr. Carel called the "adaptive functions". If I have become painfully conscious of my mental weaknesses and limitations, I am heartened to see how well my constitution stands up to these tests. My brain is a poor one; inadequately trained; I cannot concentrate for long; I cannot take in more than a few facts at a time; I am unable to remember figures. Perhaps because I am not sufficiently interested, I do not listen carefully to what is being said. I become distracted, and dissipate my thoughts in many directions. Even when travelling for hours in a truck, I am incapable, hard as I try, of thinking along one particular line. In my companions, all the time, I have been most fortunate. I have learnt a deal about good behaviour. Although concessions are made all the while to me by the others, and I am conscious of their intuitive feeling that I am not one of them, I am critical of them when I know they would be charitable towards me. The tolerance shown in the army is remarkable. A man is seldom judged, practically never condemned. There is very little backbiting and malice; and every man is impelled to behave just as well as he can to the community of which he is an organic part. Selfishness is the exception. The only man who behaved unlike the others, who showed up poorly by contrast, was suffering from thyroid trouble, a hospital case of toxic poisoning which caused the mind to react in an unnatural way.

I have not flinched at some of the rough passages, and have enjoyed the idea of seeming to be "a sport", but I have clung to my selfish civilian interests. I have not renounced my home, and have known that soon, God willing, I should be able to return to the life that suited me and to which I was accustomed. Perhaps if I had given up my freedom, once and for all, it would have made some of the delays and setbacks easier for me. There have been many times when I have wished that I could face possible disaster with the same cheerfulness as the others. I have felt physically fitter than when I lived in the big cities; but, perhaps as a result of six months' hard travel, I have recently become rather morbid and introspective.

Kunming, Thursday, May 18th. Maybe the old fire is extinguished in me, but I felt no restlessness at the thought of a week's inactivity. In this large city I feel less stranded than elsewhere. Another asset; after the foul food on the Chinese trains, the cooking here is wonderful; Yunnan hams are a Lucullan treat.

The American hospital is extraordinarily well organised. The buildings are made of solid stuff and well equipped. The day-room, in which the convalescents read their magazines, play cards and paint, is a comfortable and extremely sympathetic place.

In the neighbouring villages threshing was in progress. Old women, with silver balls in their ears and a handkerchief draped to look like a Juliet cap on their head, dumped a mass of wheat in the middle of the road, using any car or cart that passed by to do the work for them. The



lotus is grown for its seeds and vegetable roots. Cedar trees, with branches lopped off for fuel, grow to enormous heights and, lining the roads in avenues, remind one of France.

In a corner a group of Shanghai-ites are exchanging news of the people they used to know:

"What's happened to Mrs. Thornton?"

"Oh, she died in thirty-six."

"And her husband?"

"He's in the bag—they've given him the job of distributing the coal in the camp."

"Ha ha, that's bloody funny—he was the managing director of the biggest coal company before the war. I suppose now he's dealing it out by the pound. And what's happened to that woman who used to wear those huge hats?"

"Oh, Mrs. Wilkinson—they put her husband in the bag, but left her out. It seems they thought her too old to be a nuisance: I don't think she was at all flattered."

Colonel Winters, who has escaped from a Japanese prison, said that sometimes he had been cross-examined for nine hours on end. "But," he said, "they don't torture the English; the Nips are afraid there'd be

too much of a row. But if you got ill in prison life was not worth living, for they did not bother about you until you were so ill that they thought you were going to die; only then did they send you to the hospital, as they did not wish to have any deaths in the camp. But the Chinese had a bad time, for the Nips didn't consider there'd be anyone to shout for them. The Chinese came back to their cell beaten up, scarred with bruises and half dead. One favourite torture was to pour a tub full of water down the nose to swell the stomach. Yet most Chinese recovered."

An airmail envelope costs three and six: an ordinary pencil two guineas. Although the value of the Chinese dollar was supposedly fixed five years ago, since foreign supplies have been virtually cut off and the opportunity of underselling locally produced goods has vanished, it has been impossible to keep prices down; and the value of money has decreased as the value of goods has gone up. There is no real shortage of food in most parts of Unoccupied China; the vast bulk of people are better off than before the war. Pasture commands high prices, and the farmers have paid off their mortgages. The poor have a reasonable standard of living at the expense of the salaried *bourgeoisie*. School teachers, professors, students, small government officials, and others of the white collar class are the hardest hit, for their salaries have not been proportionately raised, whereas those of the coolie and artisan have increased at least five hundred times in ratio to the rise in the cost of living. Each city, overcrowded with refugees, has its own price scale. Each seems more expensive than the last. Merchants hoard rice, salt and oil, convinced that prices have not yet reached their zenith. Generally prices are rising at the rate of a thirteen per cent. increase each month, but every new day brings its particular financial shocks. Of all cities, Kunming is considered the most expensive. It is the most fabulous city in the world. Here oranges grow profusely, yet they sell for over eighty dollars apiece—at the official rate a Chinese dollar is worth threepence. Matches here cost twelve dollars a box and, since only one in four Chinese matches is effective, a light for your cigarette costs threepence. Twenty locally rolled cigarettes cost eighty to ninety dollars; a haircut, one hundred and fifty dollars. Sergeant Porter, from Cambridge, who does the catering for his mess, gave me the following current prices :

Pork	One hundred and twenty dollars per pound.
Chicken	One hundred and fifty dollars per pound.
Brown sugar	One hundred and sixty dollars per pound.
Rice	Eight hundred and forty dollars per pound.
Butter	Seven hundred and fifty dollars per pound (local).
	Fifteen hundred dollars per pound (tinned).

A fish weighing one and three-quarter pounds, a lunch for four, costs three hundred and seventy dollars, and vegetables for one meal for the same number, eighty-five dollars. Peanut and vegetable oil are used instead of cooking fat, which costs two hundred and twenty dollars.

Nor does one receive value for money. I was lent a mosquito net. In

India to-day it could be bought new for four rupees. It was a badly made net, inadequate for any known-sized bed; it was splitting at the seams and dangerously perforated—price, twenty pounds. A visit to the cinema to see a badly scratched Bette Davis in a three-year-old film in a slightly insanitary atmosphere costs two pounds. I was living in circumstances that by none could be considered luxurious; my meals, though simple, cost ten pounds a day; there was a plug, but it didn't work. To bring four buckets of rather muddy water to the bathroom the carriage alone was two pounds. The refuse on the river bank below my balcony encouraged flies and bluebottles, and every night brought its invasions of mosquitos; the rain poured through my ceiling; yet for the lease of these rat-infested rooms the British Military Mission pays a rental of fifty thousand dollars per month. When the lease is renewed, the landlord wishes to charge four hundred thousand dollars per month. In certain instances prices have increased ten thousand per cent., and amateur mathematicians can work out for themselves the percentage increase of the following:—

A rickshaw ride for one and a half miles formerly cost ten cents—to-day fifty dollars.

People who before paid four dollars fifty cents national currency dollars for their food per month now pay two thousand five hundred.

Gym shoes, formerly seventy-five cents, are now seven hundred dollars.

Mushrooms (admittedly a luxury to the English) formerly ninety cents now cost one hundred dollars for half a pound.

Under the present circumstances money has no significance to the Englishman who remains in China. The pound, before the war when exchanged for Chinese money, bought the equivalent of at least £2 5s.; to-day it is worth two shillings. Although the official rate of exchange is eighty dollars to the pound, in order to ease the financial strain on "official bodies working in the country", a subsidy is granted, whereby the pound is exchanged for one hundred and sixty dollars.

The American is able to exchange his dollar on the open market, thereby benefiting by an exchange that is five times the rate that the bank would give him at a subsidised rate. But this procedure of using the open market is officially prohibited to the British, a prohibition which baffled the Chinese and added to the discomfort of the British exile, already punch-drunk with financial blows, who somehow or other must buy the barest necessities. Only when you have something to sell are you told that certain prices have fallen from their peak. It is true that, since quantities of quinine were released on the market, the prices per tablet have decreased. But one tablet of sulphurguanadine (against dysentery) to-day fetches eighty dollars. Anyone with an outdated camera film roll to sell would benefit by fifteen hundred dollars. A gallon of petrol fetches eight hundred dollars; a worn-out motor tyre sixty thousand dollars; an old wireless set between eighty and one hundred and fifty thousand dollars; and an old car is worth literally a million dollars.



Police Force



Boy Printer

Wednesday, May 29th. Awoke to find the skies still grisly, but not too bad for flying. I packed my bag carefully, neatly. Now that I have jettisoned so much it shuts easily. They would ring from the airport, informing me at what time to be ready. But they did not telephone, so I got through to them. They said no aircraft was leaving for Chungking to-day.

Once more that sinking, trapped feeling. I was really at the end of my tether after so many delays. Day after day I had been told I was leaving, and yet I had not moved from the compound. I have become thoroughly stale, unable to do any writing. I returned dismally to my dreary bedroom filled with flies and mosquitos; the balcony still flooded with dirty rainwater. I forced myself to write, but with such difficulty! I worked until my eyes ached; ached too much to read. I leant over the balcony watching the life on the river below: a small boy, not more than five years old, was rowing his mother in a heavy barque, the mother busy baling water and shovelling her cargo of sand, dredged from the river's bank.

Three boys came along at great speed in their boat, flanked by flicking, diving cormorants: extraordinary birds with long, thin necks. The birds dived out of sight beneath the green waters, leaving no ripples—a most successful conjuring trick; then they came up again with a silver fish in the mouth; this they swallowed as far as the silver band, which bound the base of their neck, would allow. When the long funnel-neck was filled with fish, the boys hauled the birds out of the river, squeezed the fish out from the bill, and threw the birds back to do more fishing. The haul was remarkably big; the birds were apparently in a desperate state of excitement; and for me too this was the excitement of the day.

The evening was spent in the company of a new arrival—a Scot on his way to Kweilin, poor brute, who talked about the difficulties of stopping the Indians from “scoring a point” instead of taking the war seriously. He seemed keen and said: “It’s a great life; I’ve travelled a thousand miles to-day.”



CHAPTER VIII

RETURN TO CHUNGKING

AT last I returned to Chungking. While I had been absent, though nothing had been done, the house, in which I stay had become bigger, more beautiful and incredibly luxurious. I was delighted to be back. Everything looked so appetising. Before, on my arrival from India, I had thought it rather sordid: thus does one get attuned to various degrees of comfort, and accept different standards. It was so pleasant to sit and have tea and talk to Lady S. about all the things I liked. Sir H. was equally sympathetic. He said he noticed I was interested in people, and spent my time exchanging ideas with those whom I liked. In the Diplomatic Service he had not the privilege of liking or disliking.

A relief to be able to discard one's old luggage, and to find a few unexpected, forgotten treasures in the bag left behind. I have become attuned to such poverty that a half-filled cigarette tin, a pot of shaving cream and a fresh shirt are a Cræsus hoard.

Terrific heat: I was awakened at dawn by the telephone. "This is the last day of the Session at which all the provincial governors and cabinet ministers are meeting. Could you come to the Parliament Building by seven o'clock to take photographs of the great occasion?"

Little Professor Chi, sweating from head to foot, having rushed from the airport, was waiting by the roadside for me. Although it was not yet seven o'clock in the morning, the heat was almost annihilating. Dr. Chi kept mopping himself, and like the rabbit in "Alice" muttering repeatedly, "Oh dear, we're late. The Ministers are arriving, the Ministers are arriving."

Armed with blue flashes, we went through the portals of the Parliament Building, only to be stopped at the top of a flight of stairs by a young soldier who demanded to see our military permits. Dr. Kung, the Finance Minister, arrived at this moment and said we could come in with him. But the soldier was adamant. An altercation ensued. Dr. Kung threw his arms in the air. Professor Chi mopped himself anew.

"Come and have a little rest," invited Dr. Chi. I had learnt before that this means that there is a serious hitch. Dr. Chi kept muttering under his breath—"There's the Minister of the Interior, oh dear, there's the Minister of Education—of Agriculture."

The lobbies were filled: crowds fanned themselves, drank tea, read newspapers. The written permit arrived simultaneously with the ringing of a bell as everyone went into session. I prowled around clicking my camera, while the proceedings were on. I was asked several times if I understood Chinese; if so, I must "get the hell out". This was a secret session.

The modernistic Assembly Room was dripping with flags and decorated with ornamental trees and a large photograph of Sun Yat Sen. Dr. Kung, presiding, reminded me of Mr. Bevin in appearance. He has humour, a certain charm, but I should imagine he could be cruelly ruthless. Most members seemed to pay little attention to the morning's agenda; they read newspapers. In an interval I had an opportunity to photograph all the Ministers and heads of Yunnan. Most of them were so photogenic that it would be impossible to take an uninteresting picture.



Dr. Kung

Some old men were the replicas of paintings of former dynasties, with long straggling beards, fingers like cheese sticks and attenuated drapery of gown.

As we were about to leave the building there was a great clicking of soldiers' feet; bayonets snapped; a concourse of cars; and the Generalissimo came slowly up the stairs, wearing a topee and dark glasses. Off came the topee, off the dark glasses. He acknowledged the deferential nods of a few stragglers. He looked clean, well chiselled and well pressed; perhaps most remarkable, he looked extremely cool. He did not hurry. His face is of a suety texture, with the blunt features of Leon Quartermaine, the English actor. His pate is as carefully shaved as his chin. He was followed by an escort of tough-looking men in uniform, some of whom gestured, with wild flapping of arms and impatient grimaces, at the sentries and others in the lobby to move back. This menacing pantomime let down the tone of the whole entry, and robbed the Generalissimo of much of his dignity. The furtive gesticulating had a gangsterish air; it reminded me of young men in the old days at New York dances, who, getting stuck with an unattractive partner, grimaced or held up a dollar bill behind her back for someone to "cut in".

Fuhtan University, evacuated from Shanghai, is now situated within a hundred miles from Chungking. It was a shock to see the professors, who before the war were great figures in the world of culture and lived in an aura of esteem and luxury, now near destitution. Professors' salaries have not been raised in proportion to the cost of living. To-day our unappetising roadside lunch for two cost three hundred dollars. A professor is paid one thousand dollars a month. He subsists on poor quality rice; he sleeps and works in a prison-like cell, with no one to tend him. He possesses no furniture except perhaps a board propped on two dictionaries as a bed, and a case with shelves for the volumes salvaged from his former life. In accordance with the "Oil Thrift" movement, the lamp must be put out early at night. Living like peasants are the great specialists and experts on French literature or European philosophy; men who have been editors of scientific magazines, who have been the pivot of intellectual life and thought, are stranded here without money for cigarettes, some of them suffering from foot-rot so that they are unable to walk, and others from disease caused by under-nourishment and lack of baths. Yet they remain astoundingly cheerful and full of verve. Dr. Liang entertained us with fascinating anecdotes about Paul Valéry and his other friends; and he gave us a glass of tiger-bone wine, a potent and invigorating drink. Another professor talked of Dryden and Maugham with a combination of charm of manner, authority and humility. In the room next door his sister was working, but when called, she would not appear because she had not on her best dress, and did not wish to be seen looking like a servant. Dr. Young was an authority on contemporary English poets, and quoted Empson and Auden. He was at the moment translating into English the poems of Dr. Liu, not because he considered them good poems, but "because he is a friend of mine". He told us how Dr. Liu is of the old school, is accepted by the Government and writes about poetic generals. Dr. Liu publishes one book of poems per month. This is not considered excessive. These professors were touchingly benign and tolerant; yet in spite of their intellectual manner and their charm, it was occasionally impossible for them to rise above their present surroundings, not to be contaminated in some way by this squalor caused by lack of money. Even if they were fitted to earn their living by any other means, it would be considered degrading for them to take to trade.

One of the few benefits the enemy's advance has forced upon the extremely conservative population of China (eighty per cent. of whom are an agricultural people) is an increased knowledge of their own country. Before the war there were not many Chinese who travelled more than a few miles from the orbit of their family; Chinese life was largely provincial. In many instances these migrations will be permanent. Thus the racial stock will be revitalised by the new arrivals and infusion of fresh blood.

"Have you slept enough?" This was a nice way of being called by my host. The morning toilet was carried out in a most public way; a basin of water was put on the one table in his wife's bedroom. It seems



Students at Archery



Boy Scouts

that in China there is no question of "retiring" for the night; no secrecy surrounds the hours of rest; one merely flops down on the floor, wrapped in a rug, for an interval of repose, then, on waking, continues as before. In moments of tiredness I become as intolerant as any Blimp. I found the freedom of behaviour or, according to Western standards, the lack of manners, sometimes very disagreeable, particularly when, as often happens, Chinese customs and manners are acquired in exaggerated forms by Englishmen. Certain types of cultured Englishmen, in a determination to "go native" with a vengeance, sigh, yawn, moan, sing, gurf and spit with such a determination, to show their lack of inhibition, that the effect was to make me cussedly genteel. Incidentally, I found it strange that English people in China should refer to English cooking as "foreign food".

Even to-day the old University town of Chengtu possesses a great Mission life. The various compounds of granite-coloured brick, with dragon roofs, are swarming with benevolent elderly Canadians and their grey-haired wives with large mouths and pince-nez. Good work is done by these enthusiasts. In spite of the economic conditions that prevail throughout China, the exiles still manage to lead an extremely pleasant life, existing in what struck me as comparative luxury. An enormous amount of entertaining seemed to be done. One lady, with a voice like a flint, told me she seldom sat down to any meal with less than a dozen guests.

My days were spent photographing. Long, Low, Wong and I started out early visiting the leading citizens, the Provincial Governor, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Presidents of Universities and the Head of the Fire Station. The light was brilliant, and I welcomed the opportunity of polishing off an enormous number of pictures. By the end of one day I had clicked my shutter at every sort of type, from the dentist to the co-operatives, at scenes of university life in the campus, dormitories, libraries; at the sports; at boxing matches and shops heaped with sandals bearing coloured bobbles, like brilliant flowers; at the baskets of ripe peaches, pretty porcelain jars, blue and white; and at idyllic scenes under the hanging foliage of pepper and willow trees that gave me, perhaps for the first time, an impression of what once I imagined China to be. By the end of my first day I had managed to expose over one hundred and fifty pictures. I kept up this average for several days. On the morrow, Dr. Wilsford showed us over the Canadian Mission Hospital of which he is in charge.

In the huge wards there were soldiers with broken limbs, old men and children—some of the children extremely moving, for example a child transfixed with weakness, in a pose of almost incredible beauty. Would-be helpful nurses tried hurriedly to kill the picture before me by their usual maddening "tidying-up" and "straightening" of patients' clothes. A young Chinese soldier was wheeled in, in a rickshaw covered with blood. Five minutes later, his head covered with a wad on which ether was being sprinkled, he was lying on the operating table. His left arm was almost severed, the hand lying limp, the pointed fingers gesticulating for the last

time. After we had visited various floors of the hospital, we returned to the theatre to find the amputation had taken place. The red stump was being sewn up; the tendons clipped with cotton. Half the young man's livelihood had gone; for although he had received his injuries at the arsenal (his arm caught in a machine) he would receive little, if any, pension.

At the Chengtu Military Academy, General Wan Yal Hwan arranged a tremendous practice demonstration for the Generalissimo's forthcoming visit, with the march past of thousands of troops, cavalry, infantry, girl guides and the smallest boy scouts. By the end of the day, with people making suggestions for pictures almost incessantly—"Take this harbour"—"Take this platoon"—"Do these wrinkles interest you?"—my temper grew jagged. All were well meant—but it is fatiguing to explain that I cannot take anything except the subjects I know come within the orbit of my camera. By the end of the day I find my voice goes: I enunciate very clearly in a pale but exasperated invalid's voice. This is a new sign of approaching age.

At the next door house, the European colony had turned up in full force for a wedding. The festivities were almost over when we arrived. The Chinese bride, born in Canada, her hair in permanent curls, had substituted her pink satin dress for the "going-away" print. The twelve-year-old son of the Canadians in whose house the reception was given was overtired, tough and spoilt—a horrible combination. There were tempers, tears, and father took sonny up to bed for a well-deserved hiding. The flowers were wilting; the cake crumbling. Everyone looked a bit harassed, except the bridegroom, who leapt over a flower-bed at the approach of his bride in her travelling costume: a touching and gallant piece of athletics. Post-mortem—"The cake turned out well after all—You don't mind do you? But we stole your raisins!"

Friday, June 9th, Chungking. Overcast sky, damp exhausting heat, the activity of the last days in such a climate has taken its toll. I feel utterly limp. The S.'s returned for late luncheon, both pretty jaded after a gruelling morning's work. The Japs are doing only too well; a big evacuation has taken place. Missionaries turn up unexpectedly by the score: one Canadian woman escaped from behind the Jap lines disguised as a Chinese peasant, some of her orphans with her, but most of the others had gone back to their relations. One of the missionaries described the last night in the Mission. "Just as we were turning in, we heard shouts outside. It was the Tidmans! With Imogene, Timothy and Aunt Lottie. Somehow we managed, but we were eleven! So we overlapped a bit. Mr. Tompkins slept in with Mr. Webster; and we all piled in the B.M.M. truck next morning." Gloomy accounts of the Chinese resistance. It is feared the Japs will be in Changsha to-morrow. . . . We were all so tired at the end of the evening that Sir H. said, "It's lazy not to get up and go to bed."

Air-raid sirens shrieked, and lanterns of different colours were hoisted to give warning. Excited shouts from the rabbit warrens of the town. When the raid is serious people take as many of their possessions as possible and go to the dugouts in the rocks, which are commodious enough to shelter the entire population of nearly a million. Nowadays it is calculated that only one person is killed for every three bombs that fall. To-night the mountain roads were flanked with humanity awaiting the final signal to retreat into the caves. Everyone with cars takes to the road, and the exodus stretches for miles into the country. A great deal of valuable fuel is wasted.

What greater tribute can one pay the widow of Dr. SunYat Sen, than to say that in present-day China she is poor? She is the most popular woman in Chungking; kindly, sincere, courageous and known to have the welfare of China at heart. In a country where to be outspoken is sometimes dangerous, she does not hide her disappointment at the distance she believes the Government has travelled from the principles laid down by her husband, the Father of the Republic.

This gallant, rather tragic, little figure is continuously breaking into laughter. She screws up her face, like a baby about to cry, with a mirth that is alternately childlike and hearty. She laughs in answer to a compliment, laughs as a lament, laughs as a means of expressing agreement and



Madame Sun Yat Sen

understanding when, even for her, to be more precise would be unwise. She is almost peasant-like in her intuitive simplicity. When I suggested a pose with clasped hands for a drawing I wished to make of her, she grimaced as if tasting a sour fruit and said: "Oh no, Sir Cecil, it is not good for me; it is not suitable." Instinctively she knows what is correct for her, her limitations, her potentialities. She looks like Mrs. Noah; her gestures are slightly masculine, her fingers fattish and pointed; her diminutive feet hang uselessly like a doll's, not long enough to touch the floor. She is businesslike, frank and direct. She lives in a small gimcrack villa, immaculately swept and garnished, where the flowers, sent by faithful friends who possess small patches of garden, are plumped into metal shell-cases and a variety of pots. Thence she sallies forth, and learns perhaps more of the public opinion in Chungking than any other member of her family.

Local news is bad; it seems probable that the Japs may cut China in two and capture all of the rest of Free China. They could even concentrate on stopping our supplies over the Hump. No one is visibly panicky; for so long the worst has been expected; but pleasant surprises sometimes belie the gloomiest portents. Nevertheless, everyone is secretly worried as to how the various armies will meet the three Jap thrusts. Some armies fight with zeal, others may not: much depends upon the generals on the spot, on transport problems and on reinforcements.

There is even talk of the possibility of the Japs taking Chungking and of the Central Government splitting. Certain local war lords have been very frank with the Americans as to the gravity of the present situation. Why? Is it an attempt to get even more help from the U.S. Army, based on the knowledge that they would not be likely to clear out of China now, when they have already done so much? The Americans wish to give the Chinese help; but it is said they do not intend to send an army to withstand a possible attack from Indo-China.

Dinner at the K.C.Wu's. He is the Mayor of Chungking * and one of the most highly thought of young men in China to-day. To-night he was brilliant, with apt quotations from Shakespeare and other poets, of which few of the English present knew the source. The hostess was enchanting. In turquoise blue, with rouge on her cheeks, she looked sixteen, though she has three large children. She showed us some of her paintings. She specialises in the "flower-insect family," studies sprays of peach-blossom, then paints her pictures from memory. To me her technique seemed quite formed and sure, but she must continue to develop strength before tackling an orchid. This, it appears, is the most difficult

* He has since become Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs.



A.R.P. Fireman



Sweetmeat Seller

of all flowers to interpret in the Chinese idiom, for the spontaneous strokes necessary demand great vigour. We studied various forms of calligraphy, and tried to learn why one scroll was better than another.

Cooking at the Wu's is acknowledged the best in Chungking. I did not know before how delicious Chinese cooking could be. There was not too much of it; the wine was not disagreeable; and there was just enough toasting to put everyone in good spirits without turning the party into a debauch.

I wanted to photograph war-orphans; but I found myself at a Nursery School for the children of Government officials who are too badly off to afford nurses. "Why have I not been sent to see the war orphans?" At first I was told I *had* photographed them. After denying that emphatically many times, I learned that "they" did not wish the orphans to be photographed. This, it appears, was a punishment for the fact that I was alleged to have photographed the New Life Building without permission. Before I could be allowed the privilege of taking a photograph, it seemed that the orphans' faces had to be washed and made-up. A woman friend told me she had discovered that there are about a dozen orphans, who are farmed out for different official visits; that when she went to some hostel with Mrs. Chiang she recognised the same brat serving tea whom she had seen previously at two other functions.

Carton de Wiart. One of the historical personalities of this war—he negotiated the Italian Armistice—and a hero of the last, General Carton de Wiart arrived in Chungking at this time as Churchill's Chinese right ear.

Although no English blood runs in his veins, his appearance and manner are those of the traditional English warrior. With one eye, one arm, the Victoria Cross, and, he says, very few brains, he is an adventurer in the grand manner. With his Cyrano-like nose, his one remaining eye and his matchboard body, he is as dashing as the blade of a sword.

The opinion was expressed that the General had not the necessary political knowledge for the job he was to hold. Within a few days of his arrival it was admitted that he said things frankly and boldly that politicians might be chary of voicing. Legends were soon circulated of the General's fiery brilliance, wit, courtier-like gallantry, annihilating charm and almost ungovernable temper. If a sentry were to hold up the General on the threshold of the Generalissimo's house, the General's complexion might become purple-brown. One of his entourage admitted that the General is not easy to work with, but proudly added: "You're not given the V.C. for knitting. He's of a stuff young men aren't made of to-day."

General Carton considers as his home every place he stays in for more than a few weeks. (He went to Poland for a holiday and remained twenty years.) Now China has become home to him.



General Carton de Wiart

"Why the delay, Chi? We haven't rushed here at this early hour of the morning to wait half an hour outside an office. Let the manager come and join us as soon as he arrives. I'm going to take pictures of that market there."

Mr. Chi, wearing the armband of the Chinese Ministry of Information, was loath to conduct me to the market. I was insistent. "I hope no one will interfere with us," he hinted. This terror is typical of all minor officials. Later, Mr. Chi was superseded by a Mr. Li. We crossed the Yangtse river. The morning was spent taking photographs in the Navy Factory and Dockyards, where most of the important work is done in caves blasted in the rocks, safe from bombing. The activity of the dockyards was impressive—boys sawing pine planks in a frenzied trance, coolies lifting enormous weights with only the minimum pause for rest. Some criminals were working under the eyes of the Military; they had shaven heads with a tuft of black hair like a pompom on the top. They looked soured-up and brutal, and pretty ugly.

At the cotton mill which we later visited, hundreds of tissue-paper-skinned girls were working, their black satin hair grey with flying wisps of cotton. I judged how nervously tired I was from the fact that, if anyone

came round to fuss about my pictures, I was inclined to be ungenerous and, when anyone moved during a time-exposure, almost shouted my head off with fury.

The morning was wet and sticky, and I poured with sweat like a sponge; but I enjoyed travelling in the ferry boats and sampans, and had my first experience of a sedan chair ride. This seems to be the ultimate luxury. By evening, having photographed a cigarette factory, the hideous gothic Cathedral, the Police Station, an Admiral and the Communist H.Q., and having had to change my soused clothes three times, I felt it would be madness ever to click the trigger again.

Wednesday, June 21st. The Return Journey. Dawn Departure. Still raining. Our pavilion in a cloud. Visibility zero. Shu and Wong, the delightful servants, waved good-bye. I left the dark little house, feeling I would probably return there for breakfast after a lengthy misunderstanding at the airport. The daylight strengthened, but the dangerously close mountains remained invisible. We waited, in the rain, for six hours before we heard that the aircraft which was to take us on our long journey was still stranded at Chengtu, but would be here within an hour.

A friend who had come to bid me farewell spent the time discussing the predicament of China to-day. He said he feared that the only possible solution lay in revolution: too many of the country's leaders were unscrupulous opportunists. The Chinese are greedy; they always want more: never know when to stop. "Aid to China" should not be given in sums of money that lose their value at the present rate of exchange, but in medicine and clothes, to be distributed for specific objects through reliable sources. We must continue to be friends with China, but a different sociological attitude must be adopted, and the picture of Gallant China with its back to the wall must be discarded for a more realistic one. "We should try," my friend continued, "to see other people's points of view. It does not hurt us to employ Chinese technique. When I sack a Chinese clerk, I call him in for a long talk. I ask him if he does not feel he is wasting his time in the office. Couldn't he be of more use to China elsewhere? Why doesn't he think about that? By degrees, members of the family come in to thank me for the advice. They decide the clerk could certainly be of more use to China elsewhere. Although they know it's a sack no one is hurt," my friend explained. "A present is given to me, by one of the family in recognition of my kindness; the clerk leaves; my other Chinese clerks remain. But suppose I lost my patience one morning, and sacked a delinquent clerk on the spot! All the other clerks would leave in sympathy with the outcast. It is necessary to respect the Chinese way of behaviour. Never get impatient; never give them a time-limit. If you say, 'everything must be ready in three hours,' they will spend all their time wondering why you said 'three hours' and not 'four' or 'two'."

We looked up at where the mountains would be visible, if they were not hidden in rain-clouds.

"Anyone who's been to China is considered an expert, you know," my friend continued. "What do you feel as the result of your trip?"

I had arrived in abysmal ignorance of the country, but with the highest expectations. I discovered China in 1944 to be unlike all preconceived impressions. I was appalled by the poverty of the ordinary inhabitant of the most populous country on earth. From bamboo hovel to the paddy fields and back is the existence of millions—with no light to read by—with no distractions but periodic disaster. It seems the Chinese labourer is always being exploited. His history is a repetition of being ground down, badly led, and then abandoned to his doom.

I admit to neither speaking, reading nor understanding ten words of Chinese; my impressions may have been gleaned from unauthentic gossip; but even a stranger, travelling in as many out-of-the-way places as I had, could not fail, every now and again, to receive a true picture. Neither can I be accused of prejudice. Whenever, at first, I came across a European whom I found to be critical, I thought that here was another example of the provincial judging everything from the standpoint of his hearth. But it did not take me many weeks to realise, when many allowances are made, that conditions are often worse than they need be, and that there must be some justification for the serious accusations that one hears about the corruption, dishonesty and "squeeze" employed in the running of the country and the conduct of the war. I had visited China at perhaps its darkest period, after seven years of war. I saw the country in its least flattering aspect. In peacetime a nation gives only a passive display of its characteristics, but in war, while it shows its spirit, it also reveals its faults. At the moment, the Chinese have few opportunities of making progress in constitutional government; the National Military Council directs all party, political and military affairs; the Central Government has recourse to adopt Supreme Authority; a rigid censorship prevents natural freedom of expression.

Modern China has been robbed of all its graceful arabesques, has been reduced to essentials, to the lowest common denominator. From the visual point of view the life of the common people appears to be more medieval than Ming. The sturdy, squat peasant-folk engaged in incessant toil have less connection with the *chinoiseries* of Chippendale or Boucher than with the visions of an orientalised Breughel or Bosch. Possibly some of the more prosperous villagers might have been painted by a Chinese Le Nain; but the Frenchman's peasants, at the end of their day's work, enjoyed a flagon of wine. Not so the Chinese, who refreshes and stimulates himself with a cup of hot water. The poorest in England and America possess their pot of geranium or cactus at the window; the Chinese mud hut is often without the privacy of a door, and certainly boasts no sill. China's stubborn resistance to a merciless and highly mechanised foe has won her lasting praise. The army, with little equipment and the poorest supplies, has faced a powerful enemy with optimistic tenacity and stubborn endurance. One million and a half Japanese soldiers are still tied up, if not actively engaged in battle. Even so, there are those who now consider China's hand has been overplayed by certain of her country's emissaries, and that the inevitable swing-back will be cruel; the golden honeymoon may so soon be followed by divorce proceedings, and the ripping of the veil is always a painful process.

Yet how deserving is the ordinary Chinese, of whom fifty millions have



Provincial Governor's Wife



Chinese Mask

been made refugees by the Japanese advance! Cheerful and hardworking, he does his job always with something near to artistry. He carries two trees of bamboo over his shoulder with gaiety and a perfection of balance; he disperses the weight of the great load with wonderful ingenuity. To watch him at work in the fields is to marvel at a technique perfected through thousands of years. He utilises everything nature provides, with the utmost virtuosity. He lights the natural gases from the earth, using them for his stove. At the salt mines, he unlooses a long cylinder thirty feet below the ground, winds it up again to the surface filled with brine, which he then cooks, dries, cleans and converts into large lumps of salt. He hoards his own excreta to fertilise his fields. He wastes nothing. To make their contribution in the fight against oppression, even the women, whose place was always the home, have taken up pick and spade to build new roads for front-line supplies.

I had come across many delightful Chinese. There was, for example, the man running a factory who had been, among other things, a mechanic, a sailor and a coolie. He had organised the welfare of his workers, their dormitories, canteens and First Aid rooms, with the same enthusiasm that he had showed in inventing ingenious devices for replacing rare goods and saving labour. There was Dr. Yen, the galvanic little managing director of a factory where, in spite of officials who try to impede his efforts, he succeeds in making all sorts of wireless and radio equipment. In this country, where machinery seems to be considered something that must forthwith be broken, his achievement appeared all the more remarkable. Dr. Yen was in charge of over a thousand workers who, out of old oil drums, scrap paper and general wastage, create, perhaps, the only first-class and perfect newly-made objects I had seen made since my arrival. Fourteen-year-old students were learning to make the transmitters that the Chindits use in the jungle. Everything was checked and cross-checked; here were no broken springs, chipped edges and cracked crockery. Dr. Yen had shown what China is capable of achieving. . . .

During our conversation the weather became worse. The rain quivered as in an old Bioscope film. No chance of the clouds dispersing. Though we could not see it, eventually we heard our aircraft as it circled above the mountains. Suddenly a pale grey shadow appeared through the mist, only fifty feet from the landing strip, and the vast machine skimmed down through the wires stretching between the gorges. A torrential splash, and the machine landed dead straight on the runway. At last it seemed we were leaving. I shook my friend by the hand. "After all," he said, "anything you say of China is true—it's so large a country—good-bye."

Through pouring rain I made towards the aircraft. I tried to take my mind off my terror by eating some cake, but it turned to saw-dust in my mouth. In ten minutes we climbed above the storm-clouds and emerged in brilliant sunshine over harsh, clear mountains. . . .

When at last we landed, the atmosphere was dry, peppery and spiced. It seemed wonderful to be in India again. I was in holiday mood and tasted all the joys of recovered freedom.

CHAPTER IX

THE JOURNEY BACK

I REMAINED a few weeks in India, working to instructions from Bloomsbury. Then the monsoon burst with dramatic violence. Much of the countryside was flooded; photography became impossible; and I was told that, if transport were available, I could fly home *via* the United States. Full of excitement at the idea of returning to New York after these last years, I started out on my return journey. At Karachi we waited. The rains had submerged a whole area of the Air Station. So many tents had been flooded that, for many of us stranded on the flying-field, there was no accommodation. We sat around, hoping that maybe a cot in a corridor would become available and we could lie down to sleep. Meanwhile the scene was extraordinary; the asphalt a torrent; Indians wading up to their knees; the jeeps driving through waves of café-au-lait; the planes themselves, like enormous silver flying-fish, marooned on dunes or floating on a sea.

We hung around corridors; for we must be available. After a few days, the weather improved and at last an aircraft took off. Now that there was a chance that we, too, might leave, we were weighed; we filled in forms; we were "briefed" in case of "ditching." A lecture was given telling us what to do if we came down in the sea. We were to appoint a captain for each dinghy, and to abide by everything he said. We must not be extravagant with our water ration, we would not know for how long we might need it: we should clean our teeth in it, swill it around the mouth for a long time before eventually gulping it down. We must never become despondent, for surely help would come. It was worth going where we were going, said the American, "for there's a nice cool drink awaiting you. And now," he continued, "about Mae Wests—put the thing on just like a halter (you'll excuse any reference to a horse). But—one vital thing—leave plenty of room to spare under the arms and crutch, for when the thing inflates it becomes much tighter, and might damage you. You don't want to take any risks; you don't want to arrive where you're going with anything wrong with the crutch." I reflected that, should we have to take to a dinghy, I should be utterly incapable of using the radio or any of the mechanical gadgets with which we were supplied. . . .

After days of waiting the word "go" was given. About two dozen of us trooped into a vast D.C. 46. My fellow travellers were all Americans, most of them Merrill's Marauders; one nice chap from Alabama, with a tremendous drawl, was going home, having flown fifty times over the Hump. The take-off on the still waterlogged runway was spectacular; but we climbed into the air and settled down on the first part of our journey. From Aden we crossed Africa to Ascension Island, then to Brazil, Trinidad and Miami. If we were lucky, our goal should be reached within a week.

But we were not lucky. After flying over the sea for two hours we were

directed to return; the weather had "closed in at Missouri". We returned to our starting-point—to the same flooded station, to the same food, the same impossibility of escape to the town to sight-see or to go to a movie; for we were again to be "at readiness" to leave at a minute's notice. Again we did all the things that we hoped we had done for the last time; filling in more forms, getting cards for billeting, tickets for meals; and again the weather deteriorated.

Finally, after another roll-call, we trooped back into our seats in the plane. We were locked in. The pilot took up his position for the run, and there he remained. The lights in our compartment were switched off and on, on and off. Eventually he taxied back whence we had started. The pilot explained that the "feathering" of the air-screws did not work. We trooped out again, hung around, then into the aircraft again. Once more a false alarm; the pilot said "Missouri weather" had again "closed-down". We had had three false starts. Now I went to an available cot, rather thankful not to have to spend the night in the aircraft. One good night's sleep would help; but it was not to be. Ten minutes after I was undressed, word came that, after all, we were off; and this time it was final.

We started. It was dark. The floor of the aircraft was covered with bodies sprawled out on every available inch of space. At Aden, "the Vestibule of the Orient", we said good-bye to the chalky and sultry whiteness of India. Now below us was Africa, with palm trees, mud, marabouts and camels.

The noise of the aircraft makes one feel high strung, and tears stream when one reads an emotional book. It is curious how, in spite of the tremendous noise of the four engines, one hears every additional noise—the click of a playing-card slammed down, the metal ping as someone hits his head against the ceiling of the fuselage, the nasal voices of the passengers shouting to one another. I drifted into a sort of coma; no day had any particular beginning or end. We slept in the aircraft at all times of day and night. We landed at various anonymous-looking American airports scattered about Africa, to be hustled into lorries, to drink a wonderful cup of coffee in the Mess, and, in double quick time, be herded back into the aircraft.

After a day's flight in a sunny sky, with sufficient clouds to make us bump around a lot, some of the passengers were sick. I contracted a cold; a generator burnt itself out in the aircraft, and we were delayed. A padre from Utah said this was a blessing, as most of the boys were getting headaches; they could now have a night's sleep. It was a help to get the long growth of beard off one's face, and the coating off one's teeth.

"This beats me," remarked the fastidious captain from Alabama, as he laid down his fork and lumbered off from breakfast. Nor did any of the others do more than pick at the imitation waffles.

The Marauders talked about their life in the jungle. One of them reenacted, in graphic mime, an unexpected encounter with a Jap, who poked his head around a tree only five yards away. The Jap's rifle was hanging upside down under his rain-coat. "It would take him half an hour to get it into position, so he just smiled at me while I threw a grenade at him."

These youths had out-walked their Missouri mules; the animals fell

flat on their stomachs, with outstretched legs—"then we had to shoot 'em, and before leaving, we'd cut off a lump of flesh and cook it later. It was good enough until someone mentioned that we were eating horse-flesh; then I'd have to spit it out, and later start over again."

At night, if a bird whistled, a monkey screamed or the slightest sound was made, they were all wide awake. They never expected more than four hours of sleep; the first thing to do each morning, before eating, was to pack belongings, to be able to take off at a second's notice. Each man had his story to tell. One young man seemed slightly jittery; he confided that the sight of some of his friends bayoneted by the Japs had left an indelible mark upon him. He had left his buddy in a trench for only a few moments; when he came back, "he saw something he didn't like seeing". "My buddy had been bayoneted in the chest, and he hadn't a shirt on." He seemed quite cynical about the people at home. "They are not interested in us out there, they are too busy making fifteen dollars a day; they can't be bothered with the war in Burma—it's too remote—they are making the machines and that's enough for them."

Most of these chaps were still yellow-complexioned as a result of the Atapane they take against malaria. I could not understand the arguments and shop-talk that the pilots maintain: their conversation was altogether too technical, and made me feel utterly useless.

We took off. Landed. Took off again. I had no idea of the time; once I calculated it would be about four o'clock in the afternoon, and discovered it was ten-thirty in the morning. Sometimes we seemed to endure three nights in one. For instance, after an early dinner at Karno, I had gone into the deepest sleep, to be awakened five hours later. We took off in the darkness; and again I slept. After another four hours, we arrived in the dark at Accra, and again I went to sleep; this time a desperate dejected sleep, worn out by the incessant wakings and interruptions. Eventually we arrived at the great West African terminal for America. We had achieved half our journey. Here we changed planes, and here we might wait several days—nobody knew exactly how long. I enjoyed watching the Americans shaving, washing, dressing with such ease and simplicity. They are without inhibitions, shyness or modesty; they walk about naked; their latrines are communal and are used as meccas for gossip; if there should be a door they will never shut it. They live in their shop window, letting all the world see their customs, their fears and their hustle. The pilots laughed among each other; one said, "I always pray at the take-off." Another added blithely: "I'm sick of this war, sick of flying, I want to get back to make some money." They are the least greedy people in the world, their food possesses little fattening value and their sunburnt flanks are as flat as a terrier's. They are "machine-made" in their mental neatness and physical precision. The clothes they wear never really become part of them: they do not seem to contaminate the gum they chew. I enjoy their luxury; their clothes are perpetually being sent to the laundry; they are for ever buying new garments and presents. They are all very bejewelled, with enormous signet rings on both hands. Why is it that one always sees the American G.I. at the moment he takes his first puff at a cigarette—the British Tommy when he is sucking at a discoloured fag end?

Now for the last hop. We flew seven hours through the night, and then, in the early morning sunlight, saw Ascension Island below. The British gave up the idea of ever being able to make this into a landing base, but the American engineers, after dynamiting thousands of tons of rock, have succeeded in manufacturing a wonderful artificial runway. It was a perfect day, with brilliant sun and ultramarine sea. Even so, I felt sorry for the lonely G.I.'s based on this forlorn island, where not a blade of grass grows. They came out to gossip with us during our breakfast and refuelling interval. Another seven-hour hop; the sun moved from one side of the clouds to the other. After covering two thousand five hundred miles we arrived at Natal; an enormous airport, again wonderfully engineered by the Americans, with white starched décolleté sailors and every sort of pilot, including R.A.F. and Brazilians. Although the airport is one hundred per cent. American, a little of Brazil had infiltrated itself: the car driver wore a suit of ice-cream pink, the waiters spoke Portuguese and the coffee was exceptionally good. We lined up in queues for cafeteria meals, bought things from the P.X. One pilot told me he had spent three hundred dollars on trash gifts.

Belem consisted, for us, merely of a compound where Americans behaved like Americans, having shower-baths, going to the movies and spending the minimum time over meals; the trees tropical, the temperature breathless, no air, a huge moon. Again we started off. Although my memory is hazy, I do not think we called anywhere after Puerto Rico. These names sound romantic, but the landings are impersonal: we merely circled a field, our ears buzzed and hurt, and we "b'rumped" down. The aircraft became an oven of heat before we could get out for a queue and a sandwich, presently returning to the furnace for the next take-off.

The last five hours, before Miami, were almost unendurable. I was too excited to concentrate on any book. I looked out of the window at the sea and sky-scapes: some of these were incredibly beautiful—of diverse blues, or of pale greens with yellow and apricot streaks. The calm sea was like plate glass; one could see to the bottom: islands of rock, as we approached Florida, had remarkable Leonardesque character—a strange, unearthly scene. We bumped as we flew through mountainous snowy clouds lit by the evening sun.

At last the twinkling lights. "Oh boy," said a passenger. "I haven't seen anything so good as that for years!" But the freedom of arrival did not start as soon as we landed: many more queues, an exigent customs and a short lecture, which impressed me a good deal:

"Now many of you chaps have seen extraordinary things and your families will want to hear about them. Don't be unduly secretive. Tell them the names of places that have appeared in the news; but if you've made an escape, and others are likely to try to get away by the same means, don't tell your closest friend, because doubtless she has a friend who has a friend who writes radio scripts. And, fellows, one other thing I ask you—Don't criticise your allies. It doesn't help any, and there's plenty of time for that after the war."

I was told I could fly on to New York directly, but this was not to be. My papers were not valid for an army plane. I must wait here. I longed for the luxury of a Miami hotel and escape from the Mess atmo-

sphere of which I had lately had so much. But I discovered that the big hotels were all taken over by the Navy, and the places to which the taxi-driver took me for a night's rest were not very savoury. Even here, with my unshaven chin and hobo clothes, I was recognised as a delinquent, and aroused suspicion at the desk of several "family hotels". I was so over-tired that I may have been slightly hysterical: I was certainly very captious: absurd scenes took place. A negro, escorting me up to an oven in an establishment smelling of old armpits, asked, "Are you French?"

"Why?" I snapped.

"'Cos Mister there are some French people in 'dis hotel who want to talk to *anyone* who can speak French."

"Well, I don't want to speak to anyone in this hotel." And in a flash I was out of it.

At another hostelry, one old man said: "Put down your baggage, buddy." After which another, farther down the hall, asked me in reply to my query for a room: "Have you no luggage?"

The Dallas Park was my refuge for the night. "No, no papers here. No breakfasts served in the hotel." This was not the America I had known. Old forgotten men, looking like Uncle Sam, had come out to be lobby boys or very jerkily work the lift. There was a great shortage of messengers and servants; but, in comparison with England, the shops were still opulent. The news-stands were piled with hundreds of copies of hundreds of magazines, and the cafeterias were plenty itself.

I arrived at dawn in New York, and received my first impression of summer. For, in spite of sunshine and heat, summer does not seem to exist in the Orient. In the small gardens of those ugly wooden shacks that one passes on the way from La Guardia Airfield, heavily scented stocks and lush trailers were growing. But summer was already rather faded. New York was shrouded in the unbecoming haze, lightless and murky, of the hottest August she had known for many years. The city was beginning to wake up; the streets were still empty but for the news sellers; in the gargantuan honeycomb apartment blocks, radios were playing "setting-up exercises".

I arrived at the hotel in which I had spent so many winters. A strange face regarded me from the reception desk. Nevertheless there was a room for me. I was curiously excited, yet shy. Maybe this unaccustomed and somewhat overwhelming humility was due to fatigue. I felt particularly self-conscious when I ventured out into the streets. On arriving at a familiar restaurant for lunch, I was suddenly conscious of all that had happened since I was in New York last. Many changes had taken place; many friends would never return; so much time had gone by. The restaurant had been redecorated, and the fashionable women were wearing new fashions, enormous hats like platters strewn with flowers. I hung back as if suddenly I had become very old, as if too much had happened while I had been away. . . . Life had gone on. Had the elderly Rip lost his touch? I was the victim of a bout of self-pity. If I felt like this, how would they react—the prisoners of war, the men from the jungle, men

from a hundred isolated outposts? After years of separation from the life they knew, how could they hope to pick up, when they returned home, a thread of continuity?

I had forgotten much of my past existence in New York. Little by little, old memories, oddly in contrast with my experiences of the last five years, came creeping back again. I had that cold drink that we had all promised ourselves. Before long I was once again caught up in the maelstrom.

Ashcombe,
1945.

